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**1 student shot dead in clash over cheating in Bihar exam**

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**Auto stocks fall 6% amid new EV policy buzz**

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**CT: Ryan shines as SA beat Afghanistan by 107 runs**

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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## Kash Patel wins US Senate's confidence as new FBI Chief

**NEW YORK, 21 FEB**

New FBI Director Kash Patel has vowed to "rebuild" trust in the bureau as he becomes the first Indian-American to lead the country's premier law enforcement agency after being confirmed by the US Senate. The Republican-led Senate narrowly voted to confirm 44-year-old Patel on Thursday. The Senate voted 51 to 49 to confirm Patel. Two Republicans, Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski, voted against his confirmation. *—PTI*

*>>>More on Pages 5 & 6*

## Kolkata cops probe husbands in family members' murders

**KOLKATA, 21 FEB**

A day after post-mortem examinations confirmed that two women and a teenage girl were murdered in their Kolkata home, police are working to identify potential suspects and the motive behind the crime. The investigation is examining the possible involvement of the husbands of the two women, Pranay and Prasun Dey, as well as possibility of outside interference in the murders. " Autopsy said that two suffered wrist slits and throat injuries. *—PTI*

*>>>More on Page 4*

## Bhole Baba gets clean chit in Hathras case

**HATHRAS, 21 FEB**

A three-member judicial commission has given a clean chit to spiritual leader Narayan Sakar Hari, also known as Bhole Baba, in the Hathras stampede case which resulted in the deaths of 121 people during a gathering here on 2 July last year, his lawyer claimed on Friday. Surajpal, the real name of the preacher, was not mentioned as an accused in the FIR lodged by the local police following the deadly stampede in Sikandrarao's Fulrai village. However, as part of the probe, he deposed before the judicial panel in Lucknow on October 10 last year. In a video statement on Friday, the preacher's lawyer AP Singh said the three-member panel gave a clean chit to the preacher in the stampede case. *—PTI*

# TN-BJP language row intensifies amid NEP debate

## Pradhan says rise above politics; DMK says 2-language policy stays

**NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, 21 FEB**

The language row involving the BJP-led Centre and the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu intensified on Friday with Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan asking the southern state to rise above politics, while the regional party hit back saying it won't budge from its 2-language policy.

Pradhan attacked Chief Minister MK Stalin over the implementation of National Education Policy in TN and accused him of "spinning progressive reforms into threats to sustain political narratives".

On Friday, Pradhan wrote to Stalin, asking him to rise above political differences and think about the interests of young learners who will benefit from the new NEP.

Pradhan said, "the letter sent to PM is a complete negation of the spirit of cooperative federalism promoted by Modi government. Hence, it is inappropriate for the state to view NEP 2020 with a myopic vision and spin progressive educational reforms into threats to sustain their political narratives."

Dharmendra Pradhan

MK Stalin ***PHOTO: PTI***

Hitting back, TN deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin asserted the state will only follow the 2-language policy, i.e Tamil and English. Tamil Nadu was seeking only its due share of funds from the Centre from the taxes paid by it, he said.

The face-off between the Dravidian party and the BJP also saw the saffron organisation's state unit launch an online "GetOutStalin" campaign against the TN CM.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said there has never been any animosity among Indian languages and each has enriched the other, giving a fitting reply to attempts to discriminate on the basis of linguistics.

"It is our social responsibility to distance ourselves from these misconceptions and embrace and enrich all languages," Modi said.

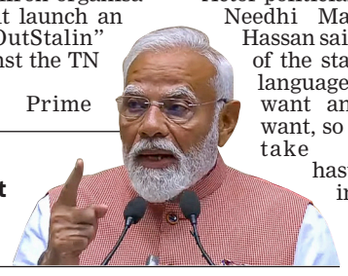
Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said people should show as much respect to other languages as he respects his mother tongue.

Actor-politician and Makkal Needhi Mannan Kamal Hassan said that, "People of the state know what language they do not want and what they want, so don't make us take decisions hastily by imposing Hindi.

*—PTI*

*>>>More on Page 3*

**Keep away from attempts to create divisions on basis of language. We must enrich all languages**
—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister



**VOTER TURNOUT ROW**

# $21M USAID fund meant for B'desh, not India: Report

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

A report revealed that the $21 million fund approved by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for voter turnout was likely intended for Bangladesh, not India, according to an investigation by The Indian Express. The fund was recently cancelled by the Trump administration's DOGE as part of a cost-cutting initiative.

According to the report, $13.4 million of the fund had already been disbursed and used for "political and civic engagement" among Bangladeshi students ahead of the January 2024 elections and projects related to the anticipated ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The Indian Express investigation found that USAID grants were routed through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), a Washington DC-based group. Out of a total of $486 million allocated to CEPPS, $22 million was earmarked for an "inclusive and participatory political process" in Moldova, and $21 million was marked for "voter turnout in India."

The investigation has raised questions about the allocation and usage of international funding for political processes in South Asia.

Meanwhile, the controversy has also brought Indian-American Veena Reddy, the former USAID India chief, under scrutiny,

India on Friday said the reports about USAID funding for certain activities in the country are "deeply troubling" and have led to concerns about foreign interference in its internal affairs.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said relevant departments and authorities are looking into the information put out by the United States administration regarding certain US activities and funding. *—Agencies*

**People who allowed such kind of an attack (to allegedly damage the electoral purity) should be exposed**
— Jagdeep Dhankhar, Vice President

**BJP's narrative was aimed at diverting attention from own sins**
—Jairam Ramesh , Congress general secretary in-charge communications

**Rahul Gandhi a 'traitor', colluding with foreign forces to weaken India**
— Gaurav Bhatia, BJP National spokesperson

# 4 gangrape woman in B'luru hotel terrace

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

In a shocking incident, a 36-year-old woman was allegedly gangraped by four people on the terrace of a private hotel building near Jyothi Nivas junction in Koramangala during the early hours of Friday.

According to sources, the victim, a married woman, and a native of Delhi, works in a catering service serving food at events. During one such event on Thursday, she had met the prime suspect who befriended her following a brief conversation.

The victim, who works in catering, met the prime suspect during an event on Thursday. Around 1.30 am, while walking near the junction, she was invited by the suspect for dinner. As the nearby eatery was closed, he took her to the terrace where three others were present. After dinner, the four allegedly gangraped her, robbed her mobile phone and purse, and threatened her to remain silent.

The police swiftly launched an investigation and nabbed three suspects, Shivu, Ajith and Vishwas, all hailing from Uttar Pradesh and all in their mid-twenties. A search is on to nab the fourth suspect who has been identified by the police.

Joint Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru East, Ramesh Banoth, told Salar News that the suspects have confessed to the crime.

This incident follows a series of sexual assault cases in Bengaluru, including the rape and murder of a Bangladeshi woman earlier this month, and arrest of a labourerfor assaulting a six-year-old girl in January. *—Salar News*

**SUMMER BREAK**

A street vendor sells watermelons to help Bengaluru residents beat the summer heat ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

# Bidar family of 5 die in accident while returning from Kumbh

**BIDAR, 21 FEB**

Five persons from Bidar lost their lives in an accident on way from Prayagraj to Kashi in Uttar Pradesh after attending the Maha Kumbh.

A total of 14 people from Bidar had travelled to Prayagraj in a hired jeep. The accident occurred early in the morning of 21 February in Rupapur near Mirzapur, about 20 km from Kashi, when the vehicle crashed into a truck. The impact was so severe that five people died on the spot.

The deceased have been identified as Suneeta,35, Santosh, 43, Neelamma, 60, Ganesh and Shivu.

The victims are residents of Ladgeri Colony in Bidar. Seven others sustained serious injuries and have been admitted to a local hospital, Uttar Pradesh Additional Police Commissioner S Chanappa said.

Minister Eshwar B Khandre expressed sorrow over the accident and announced a Rs 5 lakh compensation for the families of the deceased. He has instructed the district administration to arrange for the transportation of the deceased's bodies to Bidar and to ensure that the injured receive proper medical care.

Khandre also spoke with Channappa, a Karnataka official in Uttar Pradesh, to ensure that necessary support reaches the victims' families.

"The government stands by the affected families during this difficult time. May God give them the strength to bear this loss, and may the injured recover soon," the minister said. *—Salar News*

Rs 5 lakh announced as compensation for the families ***PHOTO: SALAR***

# KPTC to build theme park using CSR funds in B'luru

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

The Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation is set to build a theme park here using its Corporate Social Responsibility funds, officials said on Friday.

State Energy Minister K J George and Forest, Ecology, and Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre jointly laid the foundation stone for park.

Speaking on the occasion, George stated that the theme park would be built near the KPTCL station in the 5th Block of HBR Layout at an estimated cost of Rs 4.65 crore.

George emphasised that the park would serve not only as a recreational space but also as a hub for learning and community engagement.

It will feature a training center, facilities to promote rural games, an open-air theatre, walking paths, an open gym, drinking water units, and toilet facilities.

According to a statement from the Energy Minister's Office, the park located in the Sarvagnanagar Assembly constituency is set to undergo a comprehensive makeover at an estimated cost of Rs 2.75 crore. The forest department will contribute Rs 2 crore and Rs 75 lakh would be allocated from the CSR fund. *—PTI*

**NEXT HEARING IN APRIL**

# *Beef selling case: SC says Assam should find better things to do*

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

The Supreme Court has rebuked the Assam government for focusing on a case involving a man accused of transporting beef amid ban, suggesting that authorities should have "better things to do." The court issued this statement during proceedings involving the criminal case against the accused, whose transport was intercepted.

A bench comprising Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan has stayed the ongoing criminal proceedings and scheduled the next hearing for 16 April. The court expressed scepticism after the state revealed that a meat sample had been sent to a laboratory for testing. Counsel representing the accused noted that the driver had struggled to identify the nature of the meat during questioning.

The court remarked on the challenges of identifying meat from multiple animals, stating, "How will a person know only if there is beef or some other meat? Naked eyes cannot differentiate between them."

The accused's lawyer defended his client, a warehouse owner, claiming he merely facilitated the transport of packaged raw meat.

Referencing Section 8 of the Assam Cattle Preservation Act, the court pointed out that the provision could only be applied if the accused was aware that the meat in question was beef. In response, counsel for the state argued that the accused was involved in both packaging and selling the meat. *—PTI*

## INDIA, PAK MEET AMID BORDER TENSION

**JAMMU, 21 FEB**

India and Pakistan conducted a flag meeting along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Friday to address rising tensions following recent incidents of cross-border firing and an improvised explosive device (IED) attack, according to official sources.

The brigade-command level meeting took place at the Chakkan-Da-Bagh crossing point and lasted 75 minutes, beginning around 11 am. Both sides emphasised the importance of maintaining peace along the borders.

Sources noted that the meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere, with both nations agreeing to uphold the ceasefire agreement to promote stability. *—PTI*

## EAM LAUDS INDIA-CHINA UNITY FOR G20

**JOHANNESBURG, 21 FEB**

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Friday underscored the collaborative efforts of India and China in safeguarding the integrity of the G20, amid a "polarised" global atmosphere. Jaishankar is in Johannesburg for a two-day visit to partake in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

In his opening remarks during a bilateral meeting with Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, Jaishankar stated, "We should recognise that in a polarised global situation, our two countries have worked hard to preserve and protect the G20 as an institution. This in itself testifies to the importance of international cooperation." *—PTI*

## India, B'desh agree to launch new 'hotline' between border

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

India and Bangladesh have agreed to bolster communication and security along their shared border during recent high-level discussions. The biannual director general-level talks between the Border Security Force (BSF) of India and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) took place from 18th to 20th February, marking the first such meeting since the change in the Bangladeshi government last year. A new "hotline" will facilitate immediate communication between the additional directors general of both forces, enhancing real-time intelligence sharing to address cross-border crimes and security issues. *—PTI*

## City BSc student arrested with Rs 55L MDMA

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

In a significant drug bust, the City Crime Branch (CCB) arrested a BSc student for allegedly peddling narcotics and seized 522 grams MDMA crystals worth Rs 55 lakh from his possession. Acting on a tip-off about drug distribution near Shampura and Kaveri Nagar the CCB's anti-narcotics wing intercepted the student and found him carrying MDMA crystals. During interrogation, the accused said he established connections with drug suppliers in Kerala, who paid him a commission to deliver narcotics to clients in the city. Police also seized two mobile phones.

*—Salar News*

## Fire dept to bring in 184 new vehicles in 6 months

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

In line with the Central government's vehicle scrapping policy, the Karnataka Fire and Emergency Services Department (KFESD) is set to retire its ageing fleet of fire engines and replace them with new vehicles over the next six months. Karnataka Fire and Emergency Services Director TS Shivashankar said the department has identified 463 fire and rescue vehicles which are more than 15 years old. These vehicles include fire trucks, quick response units and support jeeps. At least 200 have been earmarked for scrapping in a few weeks. Sources told Salar News that although many of these vehicles are operational, their efficiency has declined significantly. With the Centre refusing to grant exemptions for emergency vehicles under the scrapping policy, the department has been compelled to decommission them, Shivashankar said.

*—Salar News*

## MLA Yatnal visits Chamundeshwari temple

**MYSURU, 21 FEB**

BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal, who has been served notice by the party's central disciplinary committee, maintained distance from media during his visit to the Chamundeshwari Temple. After offering prayers at the temple on the hillock he said on X, "As per directives of the Supreme Court, Karnataka State Pollution Control Board has given permission to start our Siddhasiri Power & Ethanol Plant in Chincholi. Offered special prayers to Chamundeshwari Ammanavaru for blessing us in this endeavour. Our Factory will generate employment & boost the economy in the region." The Vijayapura MLA was recently served a notice for the second time within two months by the BJP's Central Disciplinary Committee for being vocal against BJP strongman and former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and his son, state president B Y Vijayendra. Yatnal urged the BJP central leadership to end Yediyurappa's dynasty politics so that the BJP could decisively fight against the Congress. *—PTI*

## Students all set for 2nd PU exams from 1 to 20 March

**MYSURU, 21 FEB**

Mysuru district administration is gearing up for the second year Pre-University (PU) examinations scheduled from 1 to 20 March across 50 examination centres. Additional Deputy Commissioner Dr P Shivaraju directed officials to ensure all necessary preparations. Of the 50 centres, 27 are located in Mysuru city, while 23 are in taluk headquarters. Strict guidelines will be followed during the exams, including CCTV surveillance to prevent malpractices and ensure effective supervision. Route officers have been appointed for timely distribution of question papers. Local authorities have been instructed to maintain cleanliness around exam centres, which will be designated as prohibited zones during the period.

*—Salar News*

# BJP asks DKS to quit over 'god can't fix traffic' remark

### BJP calls DKS 'part-time Bengaluru development minister'

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's statement that even God can't fix Bengaluru traffic in the next two or three years, has come under severe criticism from the BJP, with leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Friday demanding that the former step down and make way for someone more capable if he is unable to take responsibility and address the city's traffic issues.

Speaking at an event on Thursday Shivakumar said, "I want to tell the media friends and others, even if God himself comes down from above, he cannot do anything (to fix) Bengaluru within the next one year, two year, or three year. Such is the difficulty. We have to plan properly, implement the projects properly, and we are making efforts to give a proper outline for the days ahead."

R Ashoka, B Y Vijayendra

***PHOTO: ANI***

Reacting to this, Ashoka on Friday said instead of making 'Brand Bengaluru' successful, the Congress government has made it 'bland Bengaluru'.

After admitting that there was no money for development work under the Congress government, Shivakumar has now claimed that even if God came down Bengaluru could not be transformed in the next 2-3 years, Ashoka said and called the former a "part-time Bengaluru Development Minister."

BJP state chief BY Vijayendra said Shivakumar and the Congress which came to power promising to make Bengaluru like Singapore and to develop the state, are now making such statements.

Alleging that the Congress government is incapable of filling potholes in Bengaluru, he said they are now talking about tunnel roads.

Seeking to defend Shivakumar, state Home Minister G Parameshwara said the Deputy CM was trying to suggest that there cannot be a short term measure to fix Bengaluru's issues, and it will take a little longer time with alternatives being planned and implemented.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "unless we build new infrastructure, spread out Bengaluru, traffic is going to be the biggest challenge for us. It has always been." *—PTI*

**MADE IN OTHER STATES**

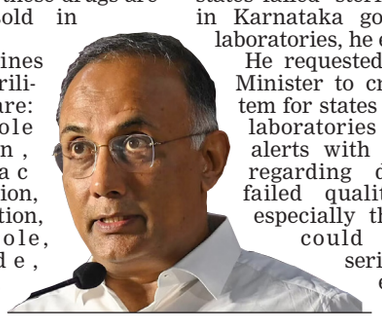
# 9 injectable drugs fail sterility tests, says Gundu Rao

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has said that nine injectable drugs manufactured in other states have failed the sterility tests done in the State's government's laboratories.

In a letter sent to the Union Health Minister JP Nadda, he said he has instructed officials of his department to take steps to ensure that these drugs are no longer sold in Karnataka.

The medicines that failed sterility tests are: Metronidazole injection, Diclofenac Sodium Injection, Dextrose injection, Metronidazole, Frusemide, Piperacillin, Tazobactam Calcium Gluconate , Ondansetron, and Astropine Sulphate.



"I am writing to bring your attention to the repeated instances of sale within Karnataka of contaminated injectable drugs manufactured in other states," Rao wrote to Nadda.

Between 1 January and 16 February, nine injectable drugs manufactured in other states failed 'sterility testing' in Karnataka government's laboratories, he explained.

He requested the Union Minister to create a system for states and central laboratories to share alerts with each other regarding drugs that failed quality testing, especially those which could cause serious adverse events.

*—PTI*

# HM: No plan for early leave during Ramzan

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Friday said that there was no proposal before the government, nor had any discussion taken place, regarding allowing Muslim government employees to leave work early during Ramzan.

He was responding to a question on state Congress vice-presidents Y Syed Ahmed and A R M Hussain's petition to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to allow all Muslim government employees to leave work early during Ramzan.

"They could have written a letter, but there is no such proposal before the government. No such discussions have happened either at the cabinet or otherwise," Parameshwara said.

Responding to such permission in Telangana being criticised by BJP as appeasement politics, he said, "We are not concerned about Telangana."

The petition seeks the CM to decide so that Muslim staff can leave work by 4 pm to break their fast, citing governments in the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and Telangana deciding to allow Muslim employees to leave work an hour early during Ramzan.

Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly R Ashoka hit out at the ruling Congress, calling the proposal to the government appeasement politics. *—PTI*

**PREPARING FOR THE HEAT**

A street vendor arranges mud pots ahead of summer at Mallathahalli, near Kalagrama, in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

# K'taka BJP to protest if govt shuts 9 universities

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra warned the Congress government of large-scale protests if it goes ahead with its plans to close nine state-run universities in Karnataka.

Terming the move "unscientific and foolish," he said financial considerations should not be the basis for closing such universities.

A cabinet sub-committee headed by Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar to study the functioning and financial position of public universities in Karnataka, had recently decided to recommend the closure of nine out of ten state-run universities established during the previous BJP regime, according to official sources.

Speaking to reporters after participating in a roundtable conference organised by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), which was attended by education experts, public representatives, and others, he said there should be a non-political fight on this issue.

He added that the ABVP has taken the matter seriously, and the BJP fully supports it.

According to reports, there are plans to shut down nine of the ten newly established universities—Koppal, Bagalkot, Haveri, Kodagu, Hassan, Chamarajanagar, Nrupathunga, Mandya, and the Maharani Cluster—excluding Bidar. *—PTI*

**CRIME BEAT**

## 11 held for machete stunts

***PHOTO: SALAR***

**Bengaluru, 21 FEB**

City police arrested eleven youths for allegedly performing dangerous motorcycle stunts while brandishing machetes on Bengaluru roads. Acting on the directions of Bengaluru Police Commissioner, officers from Bengaluru West Division seized several two-wheelers used in the incident. The arrests followed widespread outrage after dashcam footage, shared on social media platforms, showed the youths creating a nuisance in Ramamurthy Nagar and near the KR Puram flyover. The incident occurred on the night of 13 February. Over 25 youths had gathered outside Noor Masjid in KG Halli following night prayers, where the accused reportedly planned to perform stunts for social media content. Videos showed them riding triple on two-wheelers, performing wheelies, and waving machetes, including on KG Halli's main road and the Hoskote toll route. *—Salar News*

## Rs 2.64 cr visa scam: Couple held

**Bengaluru, 21 FEB**

A couple was arrested by the Cyber Economic and Narcotics police of the Southeast Division for allegedly defrauding 51 people of Rs 2.64 crore by promising overseas employment visas, Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda said. The accused, Saqlain Sultan and his wife Nikhath Sultan, allegedly advertised visa services for jobs like horse jockey positions through Facebook. To build trust, they initially provided two genuine visas before starting their scam. Instead of processing visas, they reportedly used the money to fund a lavish lifestyle, traveling to Sri Lanka, Dubai, Goa, and Ooty. The scam was exposed after a complaint on 24 January. Police seized assets including Rs 66 lakh in cash, two luxury cars, two premium motorcycles, and 24 grams of gold jewellery during a raid at the couple's Tilak Nagar residence. A third suspect is still at large, and investigations are ongoing to identify the full extent of the scam. *—Salar News*

## Son stabs mother for alcohol

**Bengaluru, 21 FEB**

Jnanabharati police arrested a man for allegedly stabbing his mother and snatching her gold chain to fund his alcohol addiction. The accused, identified as Rahul, was unemployed and dependent on his mother, Vijayalakshmi, a domestic worker, for his expenses. Police said Rahul's alcohol dependency had become a point of contention between him and his mother. For nearly a week, Vijayalakshmi refused to give him money after discovering his addiction. Enraged, Rahul demanded her gold chain to sell for liquor. An argument broke out between the two at their residence on Thursday evening, during which Rahul allegedly attacked his mother with a knife and fled after snatching the chain. Vijayalakshmi is recovering in a hospital. The accused has been booked under charges of attempt to murder and theft, police said. *—Salar News*

# Residents back Koppal steel plant

**KOPPAL, 21 FEB**

Several local organisations have urged the district administration to facilitate early establishment of an integrated steel plant by the Baldota Group in Koppal, one of the backward districts of the state.

Baldota Group signed an agreement with the state government at the recent Global Investors Meet in Bengaluru to set up the steel plant with an investment of Rs 54,000 crore.

The Baldota Steel and Power Limited (BSPL) is expected to boost steel production and generate thousands of jobs. Local organisations believe this will prevent large-scale migration of people from the district, while also contributing to its economic growth.

The Baldota Steel plant in Koppal had faced opposition over potential environmental damage ***PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE***

The Baldota Group has assured that 80 per cent of the jobs in the plant will be reserved for local residents. It has also promised social welfare initiatives such as women empowerment programmes, forestation drives, construction of sanitation facilities and skill development.

The project has faced opposition from some local groups and leaders who raised concerns about potential environmental damage. *—Salar News*

## Bus conductor beaten for not speaking Marathi in Belagavi

**BELAGAVI, 21 FEB**

A conductor of the state-owned transport corporation bus was assaulted on Friday for not replying to a passenger in Marathi on the outskirts of Belagavi which borders Maharashtra.

The 51-year-old conductor Mahadevappa Mallappa Hukkeri said that a woman boarded the bus with her male companion at Sulebhavi village and spoke in Marathi.

Hukkeri said he told her that he did not know Marathi and asked her to speak in Kannada.

"When I said I don't know Marathi, the woman abused me saying that I must learn Marathi. Suddenly a large number of people gathered and assaulted me on my head and all over the body," the conductor said.

He has been admitted to the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences, police said adding he had minor injuries and is out of danger.

Following the incident, pro-Kannada activists demanded the arrest of the involved. This incident may flare up the border row. *—PTI*

## Vijayapura police raid 104 money lenders; seize cash

**VIJAYAPURA, 21 FEB**

In a major crackdown on illegal lending practices, Vijayapura police raided the residences and offices of 104 microfinance companies and money lenders on Friday, seizing Rs 62.29 lakh in cash and 55 grams of gold. According to Superintendent of Police Lakshman Nimbaragi, the raids were conducted across 25 police station limits, leading to the recovery of 489 signed blank stamp papers, 285 bank cheque leaves, 95 bank passbooks, and 245 other documents such as promissory notes and property agreements linked to loan transactions. The raids targeted 37 money lenders, and all seized cash and items will be deposited at the Vijaypura Deputy Commissioner's office, Nimbaragi confirmed.

*—Salar News*

***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

**AHEAD OF SUMMER**

# *Procuring water connection gets simpler*

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

With summer approaching, Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) chairman Ram Prasath Manohar announced on Friday that steps are being taken to simplify the process for apartments to obtain Cauvery water connections.

The move follows a series of meetings he attended to raise awareness among apartment residents about potential water challenges during the summer and address their concerns regarding Cauvery water connections.

The BWSSB chairman emphasised the need to streamline the application process and its follow-up.

He also noted confusion regarding the fees for apartment water connections.

***PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE***

To further assist customers, BWSSB will establish a three-member committee, led by the Chief Engineer, to address complaints related to tariffs. This committee will thoroughly review complaints and provide timely resolutions, the statement added.

"Our goal is to offer transparent solutions, eliminating unnecessary delays and excessive charges through this committee," Manohar stated.

According to the statement, apartment residents with Cauvery water connections will receive a guaranteed daily supply of 200 litres per household.

Following the inauguration of the Cauvery Phase 5 project, BWSSB now has sufficient water resources and is working to distribute the supply across Bengaluru in a phased manner.

According to him, in collaboration with the Bangalore Apartment Federation, BWSSB has already been conducting a series of meetings to prevent water shortages during summer.

Through 258 Cauvery Connection Campaigns, over 21,000 connections have been provided thus far. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## Sonia Gandhi discharged from hospital

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Sonia Gandhi was reportedly discharged from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in New Delhi on Friday morning. Sonia Gandhi was admitted to the hospital for a check-up after she experienced abdomen related issues on Thursday. The Congress leader was under the observation of a team of doctors. Sources say she is under no danger. *—PTI*

## Activist booked for threatening Goa CM Sawant

**PANAJI, 21 FEB**

A case was registered against a social activist for allegedly making threatening statements against Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, an official said. The Panaji police booked social activist Rama Kankonkar, over his "hateful" and "derogatory" remarks during a press conference at Azad Maidan on Wednesday. According to the FIR, the accused threatened to "bury the CM alive." Such a statement could create or promote enmity among the general public and provoke them against the CM, the official said. Kankonkar has been booked for criminal intimidation and public mischief, a police spokesperson said, adding that the accused has been summoned to appear before the cops.*—PTI*

## Video of accused in Baba Siddique murder goes viral

**MUMBAI, 21 FEB**

A purported video of the wanted Zishan Akhtar claiming that a Pakistani gangster helped him escape from India has gone viral. Akhtar is accused in the NCP leader Baba Siddique murder case. In the video that surfaced on Thursday, Akhtar purportedly said Pakistani gangster Shahzad Bhatti helped him escape from India, and he was now "far away from Asia." He was also heard threatening his "enemies". But a Mumbai crime branch official said the police believed that Akhtar was very much in India. They had information that he had made a few extortion calls in Punjab last month, the official said. Akhtar was allegedly one of the masterminds of former Maharashtra minister Siddique's murder in Mumbai on 12 October. As per the police, he was last spotted at Nainital along with Lonkar before the murder. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

## CPI(M) leader AV Russel dies at 63

**KOTTAYAM, 21 FEB**

CPI(M) leader AV Russel, who was re-elected as the secretary of the party's Kottayam district committee last month, died, party sources said on Friday. He was 63 years old. Russel, who was undergoing treatment for cancer, suffered a heart attack while preparing to return home after surgery at Chennai Apollo Hospital. Having joined the CPI(M) in 1981, he contested the legislative assembly election from the Changanassery seat in 2006. From 2000 to 2005, he was a member of the district panchayat. He was also the president of the Changanassery Urban Bank. On 4 January, he was re-elected as the Kottayam district secretary of CPI(M). Minister for Cooperation and Registration, V N Vasavan, expressed his condolences.*—PTI*

# Don't throw stones at beehive: Stalin to Pradhan

## He says BJP is fueling communal tension and pushing Hindi

**CHENNAI, 21 FEB**

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Friday lashed out at the Centre warning it not to throw stones at the beehive, and said he will not permit any activities inimical to Tamil language, the state and its people, on the soil, so long as he and his DMK existed.

While the DMK government spent funds for people's welfare measures, the BJP-led government was spending to fan communal tension and thrusting Hindi, he alleged.

He stressed that people's development and demolishing obstacles were the cornerstones of the Dravidian model of governance

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin sharply to Pradhan's criticism. He reiterated that

Dharmendra Pradhan, MK Stalin

PHOTOS: PTI

Tamil Nadu would adhere to its long-standing two-language policy and expressed his discontent with the Central Government's approach to funding.

Pradhan had previously accused Stalin of politicising educational reforms, urging him to rise above political differences and consider the benefits for young learners. In response to Stalin's letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in which he condemned linking crucial schemes to the NEP, Pradhan characterised the letter as a negation of cooperative federalism and insisted that the state's view of the NEP was myopic.

As tensions escalate, Udhayanidhi also sidestepped questions about BJP state chief K Annamalai, who has been vocally critical of the DMK.

"I am not interested to talk about him," was Udhayanidhi's terse reply to reporters. Annamalai has intensified his campaign against Chief Minister Stalin, launching the "GetOutStalin" initiative on social media, addressing issues like lawlessness and women's safety. The ongoing confrontation between Tamil Nadu and the central government over the NEP reflects deeper political rifts, with the DMK accusing the education ministry of withholding essential funds. *—PTI*

## 'MODI JHOOTA HAI'

Former Delhi chief minister Atishi and others with posters against Delhi government for not fulfilling promises PHOTO: PTI

# Atishi and Rekha trade barbs over 'broken promises'

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

AAP leader Atishi has raised concerns regarding the newly formed BJP government's failure to approve a promised scheme providing Rs 2,500 financial aid to women during its first cabinet meeting.

Atishi, a former Delhi chief minister, accused the BJP of neglecting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pledge of financial assistance to women under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, asserting that Modi and BJP president JP Nadda had committed to implementing the scheme in the first cabinet meeting following their election victory.

In the wake of the BJP's return to power after 26 years, Atishi vowed that the AAP would ensure payments to women, alongside other commitments like 300 units of free electricity.

Responding to the opposition's criticism, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta defended her government's actions, highlighting the immediate implementation of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme. She claimed that previous governments had failed to address key issues for Delhi's residents and stressed her commitment to fulfilling all promises made by the BJP. *—PTI*

### CAG reports to be tabled in first session

The inaugural session Delhi Assembly is set to begin on 24 February, as confirmed by officials. The session will resume for the tabling of pending Comptroller and Auditor General reports on the previous AAP government. BJP had sought court intervention to force the prior government to disclose these reports, accusing them of concealing alleged corruption.

## 4 Wiki editors booked for content on Shivaji

**MUMBAI, 21 FEB**

Maharashtra Cyber has registered a case against at least four editors of Wikipedia for not taking down "objectionable" content on Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj from the open source encyclopedia, officials said on Friday.

The nodal agency had sent a notice to the California-based Wikimedia Foundation, requesting the removal of the content from Wikipedia. The Wikimedia Foundation is a non-profit organization that hosts Wikipedia. Maharashtra Cyber agency had also mentioned that the Wikipedia content was inaccurate and could potentially lead to a law-and-order situation in the state as Sambhaji Maharaj, the son of Maratha empire founder Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, is highly revered in India.

The information posted on might also lead to unrest among his followers, it mentioned. As there was no reply from Wikimedia about taking down the content, the Maharashtra Cyber has registered a case against at least four editors of Wikipedia under relevant sections of the IT Act, he said. *—PTI*

## 10 suspects identified in Cong MP's attack

Assam Congress activists stage a protest against the alleged attack on party MP Rakibul Hussain, in Guwahati PHOTO: PTI

**GUWAHATI, 21 FEB**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Friday that ten individuals have been identified in connection with the attack on Congress MP Rakibul Hussain and his personal security officers (PSOs) in Nagaon district. Sarma confirmed the police's progress in a post on X, stating that action would be taken against those involved as per the law.

The incident occurred on Thursday when masked assailants attacked Hussain, the MP for Dhubri, in the Rupahihat area while chanting 'Rakibul Hussain go back'. Although Hussain was struck with a cricket bat, he emerged uninjured, while his two PSOs sustained minor injuries.

In the wake of the attack, opposition parties condemned the state government, describing it as a "murder of democracy". Demonstrations by Congress MLAs in the Assam Assembly demanded immediate arrests.

Critics argued that inadequate security measures had contributed to the incident and alleged a broader "jungle raj" environment under the ruling party. They expressed concerns over the potential ramifications as Assam approaches the 2026 assembly elections, claiming the attack could be part of a "planned conspiracy" against the Congress party. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

## Oppn leader demands disclosure on Pak citizen

**GUWAHATI, 21 FEB**

Debabrata Saikia, Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Assembly, has urged Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to reveal any information regarding Pakistani citizen Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, particularly if it relates to national security. Saikia called for accountability from BJP leaders Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh for Sheikh's alleged involvement in anti-India activities, as suggested by Sarma. Assam Police recently formed a Special Investigation Team to probe Sheikh's contentious social media comments. Sarma claimed Sheikh had visited India 18 times and described the findings as potentially damaging to the Congress party's reputation in Assam. Saikia insisted that such critical information should be made public without delay. *—PTI*

# Adani is not a personal matter: RaGa to Modi

**RAE BARELI, 21 FEB**

Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, launched a fierce attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Rae Bareli, emphasising the significance of the ongoing controversy surrounding the Adani Group. Gandhi stated that Modi's claim that the issue was a "personal matter" undermined its national implications. He alleged that corruption charges against Adani were pending in the US and contended that Modi should have addressed these concerns during his recent discussions with US President Donald Trump.

He alleged that PM Modi told the American press that business tycoon Gautam Adani was his friend he would not ask Trump anything about him.

A case of "corruption and theft" was pending against Adani in the US, Gandhi further alleged.

"Firstly, India is a democratic country, and our culture and our thought philosophy are, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. We consider the whole world as one family. I believe every Indian is mine," he said.

- He alleged that Modi told the American press that business tycoon Gautam Adani was his friend he would not ask Trump anything about him. A case of "corruption and theft" was pending against Adani in the US

Last year, the Department of Justice under the previous president Joe Biden charged Adani for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250 million (about Rs 2,100 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts.

Gandhi argued that while ordinary citizens bear the burden of GST on essentials, wealthy industrialists escape proportional taxation, highlighting the increasing economic disparity.

In addition to the Adani controversy, Gandhi scrutinised the BJP's performance in Uttar Pradesh, dubbing its "double-engine government" a complete failure. He accused the government of neglecting crucial issues such as unemployment and inflation, asserting that the rising joblessness stemmed from policies like demonetisation, which he claimed devastated small businesses. *—PTI*

## 'MODI IS MY MENTOR'

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on Friday described his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi as his "elder brother" and "mentor" and sought his guidance to help him contribute to transformation of public service in the neighbouring country. In his keynote address at the School of Ultimate Leadership (SOUL) conclave here, Tobgay made liberal use of Hindi that drew multiple applause from the audience. Tobgay termed government's initiatives like Make in India, Digital India, Swachh Bharat as Modi's "gifts to the nation". PHOTO: PTI

## Don't take me lightly: Shinde amid reports of MVA rift

**MUMBAI, 21 FEB**

PHOTO: PTI

Amid talk of a growing rift between him and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Friday said nobody should take him lightly, and made a veiled reference to the toppling of the MVA government.

It was a warning for those who were capable of understanding, he said, talking to reporters in Nagpur, but at another event later, maintained that there was no "cold war" between him and Fadnavis.

"In 2022, I toppled the cart of those who took me lightly, and we brought in a new government that stayed in the people's hearts," Shinde told reporters in Nagpur, apparently referring to the collapse of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government.

Shinde had then become chief minister by splitting the Thackeray-led Sena and forming an alliance with the BJP.

While both Shinde and Fadnavis have denied that there is a discord, recent developments suggested there are simmering tensions.

After the elections, Shinde had to agree to a role reversal with Fadnavis, his deputy in the previous regime, becoming chief minister.

**2 held over threat to Shinde**

Mumbai police have arrested two individuals from Buldhana district, Maharashtra, in connection with emails threatening to bomb the car of Shinde. Mangesh Wayal, 35, and Abhay Shingne, 22, from Deulgaon Raja, were detained following a probe triggered by the messages received by the police. *—PTI*

## KIIT STUDENT SUICIDE

# *India values int'l students' safety: MEA*

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

The government expressed deep sadness regarding the recent death of a Nepalese student at the KIIT private engineering college in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, and reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of all international students in India.

In response to queries about the incident, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that the ministry has remained in "constant touch" with both the Odisha authorities and KIIT officials since the matter arose. "We have also maintained close contact with the Nepalese authorities. Following our outreach, several actions have been initiated by the Odisha government and KIIT to manage the situation," he noted.

In connection with the case, Odisha Police have arrested multiple individuals, with five additional staff members from the college detained for allegedly assaulting Nepalese students who were vacating their hostel following directives from the institute. To date, 11 individuals have been arrested, including an engineering student accused of abetting the suicide of the 20-year-old Nepalese woman in her hostel room last week.

The body of Prakriti Lamsal, who was found dead at the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) in Odisha, being taken to Nepal PHOTO: PTI

In the wake of her death, Nepalese students have organised protests demanding justice.

Meanwhile, Odisha Assembly witnessed a united front against the mistreatment of Nepalese students following the KIIT suicide. Members from various parties, including the ruling BJP and opposition Congress and BJD, condemned the actions of university staff and called for a judicial inquiry.

However, the opposition members walked out when Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj did not respond to their demand for a judicial inquiry.

- The controversy erupted after the girl's tragic death in a women's hostel, leading to allegations of harassment towards Nepalese students, who were reportedly served eviction notices

The minister assured the House that action would be taken against those responsible, in accordance with the law and the findings of the investigation. He confirmed ongoing police investigations into the criminal aspects of the case, alongside a high-level state inquiry into lapses, including why only Nepalese students faced eviction and why they were subsequently abandoned at Cuttack railway station without proper arrangements for their safety. *—PTI*

## Student found dead in AMU hostel

**ALIGARH, 21 FEB**

A 25-year-old postgraduate student at Aligarh Muslim University has allegedly taken his own life by hanging outside his hostel room. Mohammad Shakir, a first-year MA Theology student, was discovered hanging from an iron rod concealed in a corner outside 'Mumbai Hostel' on the university campus, according to AMU Proctor Mohamad Waseem Ali. Witnesses reported that Shakir had been in his room until approximately 10pm the previous night and had eaten his evening meal without any indication of distress. AMU authorities have informed the police and contacted Shakir's family, who reside in Lakhimpur Kheri district. *—PTI*

## DU Miranda House objects to 'Ziddi Girls' trailer

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Filmmaker Shonali Bose's web series 'Ziddi Girls' is at the centre of a row with students and Delhi University's Miranda House principal saying the trailer tarnishes the image of the college. The Prime Video fictional series is set in a Delhi college, referred to as MH, which is an acronym often used for women's college Miranda House. The show revolves around the lives of five students in search of their identity. In her letter to Bose on Thursday, Miranda House principal Bijailaxmi Nanda asked the director to remove any mention of 'MH' in the trailer and the show. The makers responded with the disclaimer "this is a work of fiction.*—PTI*

## Fireworks accident injures five at Kerala temple

**KANNUR, 21 FEB**

A fireworks mishap at Muchiriyan temple in Azheekode Neerkavu during the early hours of Friday has resulted in five injuries, including a 12-year-old child. Authorities reported that one individual is in a serious condition and has been transferred to a hospital in Mangalore for urgent treatment. The incident occurred around 4 am when a firecracker meant to explode in the air fell into the crowd and detonated, leading to the injuries. The temple was hosting a Theyyam performance, drawing a substantial audience at the time of the accident. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

## Indian biologist among Time's 'Women of the Year'

**NEW YORK, 20 FEB**

Purnima Devi Barman, a 45-year-old Indian biologist and wildlife conservationist, has been honoured by Time Magazine as one of its 'Women of the Year' for 2025, highlighting her extraordinary leadership in environmental conservation. She is the only Indian woman on the list, which features 13 remarkable women, including actress Nicole Kidman and French activist Gisele Pelicot. Barman's journey began in 2007 when she intervened to save greater adjutant storks in Assam, a species that saw its population rise from 450 to over 1,800 due to her efforts. She leads the "Hargila Army," a network of 20,000 women educating communities about these birds, thereby integrating wildlife conservation into local culture and traditions. *—PTI*

# 1 student shot dead in clash over 'cheating' in Bihar exam

## 2 injured as two student groups clash; cops seize firearm

**SASARAM, 21 FEB**

A class 10 student was shot dead, while two others suffered injuries following a clash between two groups of students in Bihar's Rohtas district on Friday, police said. The clash reportedly broke out regarding cheating in the exam hall in Sasaram. Amit Kumar succumbed to injuries during treatment, and his classmate has been detained for the crime, Superintendent of Police Raushan Kumar said.

"Preliminary investigation revealed that an altercation took place between two groups of students inside an examination centre in Sasaram on Thursday... When Amit and another student, Sanjit Kumar, were returning home in an autorickshaw, they were stopped by one of their classmates who allegedly shot at them and fled," he said.

However, police said probe has also revealed that the detained minor was allegedly being harassed by Amit, and his friends for one year. "While Amit died during treatment, the condition of Sajnit is reported to be stable. A case has been registered and the minor boy who fired at his classmates detained.," the SP said.

Family members of the deceased student blocked a stretch of the nearby highway and disrupted movement of traffic by burning tyre *PHOTO: X*

- The Class-10 student, Amit Kumar, succumbed to injuries during treatment, and his classmate has been detained for the crime, SP Raushan Kumar said

The exact cause behind the clash and the subsequent firing is yet to be known, he added. Police have seized the firearm and the mobile phone of the accused minor.

Later, family members of the deceased student blocked a stretch of the nearby highway and disrupted movement of traffic by burning tyres.

The protesters also kept the body of the deceased on the highway, demanding immediate action against the accused.

The blockade was lifted after the intervention of senior police officers, an official said. "A gunfight between students took place... one of the students received bullet injury in the leg and another in the back. Villagers along with family members of the deceased student tried to block the highway, however, we ensured them of action in the case, said an official. *—PTI*

**AUTOPSY CONFIRMS HOMICIDE**

Sudeshna and Romi Dey *PHOTO: ANI*

# Husband's probed in WB triple murder

**KOLKATA, 21 FEB**

A day after post-mortem examinations confirmed that two women, Sudeshna and Romi Dey and a teenage girl were murdered in their Kolkata home, police are working to identify potential suspects and the motive behind the crime.

The investigation is examining the possible involvement of the husbands of the two women, siblings Pranay and Prasun Dey, as well as the possibility of outside interference in the murders. "The post-mortem reports indicate that the two women and the girl were killed, raising questions about the perpetrators," an investigating officer stated. The autopsy revealed that the two women suffered wrist slits and deep throat injuries, while the minor girl was believed to have died from poisoning. The brothers had suggested a suicide pact involving the family, claiming they all consumed porridge laced with sleeping pills. However, police believe this may have been an attempt to mislead investigators.

Additionally, three family members were injured in a car accident after the incident, and one of the injured alerted authorities to the deaths. Forensic teams have collected evidence, including samples from the crime scene and CCTV footage from the Dey residence. Investigators are also probing the car that was involved in the crash, which occurred shortly after the incidents at the family's home and was found to have no mechanical issues. *—PTI*

# SC agrees to examine YouTuber's plea to club cases over 'obscene remarks'

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine YouTuber Ashish Chanchlani's plea to club the cases registered in connection with alleged obscene remarks made on a YouTube show.

The apex court has requested responses from the Maharashtra and Assam governments regarding a plea from Chanchlani. He seeks to quash or transfer to Mumbai an FIR filed in Guwahati, relating to claims of promoting obscenity during an online show.

The bench, comprising Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh, issued a notice and connected Chanchlani's petition with that of influencer Ranveer Allahbadia, who is also facing scrutiny over comments made on the same show. At the outset, the bench reminded Chanchlani's counsel that bail had already been granted. The counsel confirmed the relief but argued against multiple FIRs concerning a single show.

In related developments, Maharashtra Cyber has summoned actor Rakhi Sawant to provide a statement regarding her appearance on the controversial show, while over 50 individuals, including Chanchlani and Allahbadia, have been called to give their accounts. *—PTI*

### 3 HC judges get Collegium nod

The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna has approved the proposal for appointing three additional judges as permanent judges in the Bombay High Court. It also recommended that the term of Additional High Court Judge Justice Manjusha Ajay Deshpande, should be extended for a year in the Bombay High Court.

### Is Ansari probe over: SC to cops

The Supreme Court has recalled its directive for police to complete the probe against MLA Abbas Ansari under the UP Gangsters Act within ten days. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal claimed the investigation was complete and a chargesheet filed, while the UP government sought clarification. Ansari faces allegations of extortion and assault, with his bail application previously rejected by the Allahabad High Court.

### SC junks bail plea in Narco terror case

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed the bail plea of an accused in an alleged narco terrorism case, relating to the seizure of 532kg of heroin and 52kg of mixed narcotics worth Rs 2,700 crore at Attari. "The charges are very serious," the bench said while dismissing the bail plea.

## Dowry demand not must to invoke cruelty charges: SC

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

The Supreme Court has said dowry demand was not a prerequisite to constitute the offence of cruelty under section 498A of the IPC introduced in 1983 to protect married women from the husband and in-laws.

A bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Prasanna B Varale on 12 December, 2024 said the essence of Section 498A IPC lay in the act of cruelty itself and a dowry demand was not necessary to invoke the provision against errant husbands and in-laws.

"Therefore, either form of cruelty, independent of a dowry demand, is sufficient to attract the provisions of Section 498A IPC and make the offence punishable under the law," said the bench.

The top court said it was clear that an unlawful demand for dowry was not a prerequisite element to constitute "cruelty" under Section 498A IPC.

"It suffices that the conduct falls within either of the two broad categories outlined in clauses (a) or (b) of the provision, namely, wilful conduct likely to cause grave injury or mental harm (clause a), or harassment intended to coerce the woman or her family to meet any unlawful demand (clause b)," added the bench.

Section 498A (Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty) was introduced in the IPC in 1983 with the primary objective to protect married women from cruelty of their husbands or in-laws.

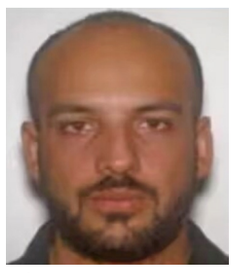
The provision provides a broad and inclusive definition of "cruelty" encompassing both physical and mental harm to the woman's body and in addition, it covers acts of harassment in pursuit of unlawful demands for property or valuable security, including demands related to dowry. *—PTI*

# ED raids Mohali man in Canada's biggest gold heist

**CHANDIGARH, 21 FEB**

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday searched the Mohali premises of a man who is an alleged suspect in Canada's biggest-ever gold heist of more than USD 20 million, official sources said.

The sources identified the man as Simran Preet Panesar, who is in his thirties.



Simran Preet Panesar *PHOTO: X*

The man could not be contacted for his response on the allegations.

The federal probe agency has recently filed a criminal case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to investigate the said loot from Canada's Pearson International Airport in April, 2023.The premises of Panesar in Punjab's Mohali is being searched and the ED investigators will question him, the sources said.

The ED had booked a case suo moto, without a request from Canada, as the PMLA allows for such an investigation into in an instance of cross-border ramification where an Indian national is suspected to be involved.

According to media reports, an air cargo container with gold bars was stolen from a secure storage facility at the said airport in 2023, possibly using fake documents. *—PTI*

# 17 militants arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, 21 FEB**

Seventeen militants belonging to different banned outfits were arrested from four Manipur districts in the last 24 hours, police said on Friday.

Thirteen militants belonging to the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) outfit were nabbed from Moirang Kiyam Leikai area of Bishnupur district on Thursday. A total of 27 cartridges, three walkie-talkie sets, camouflage uniforms and other tactical accessories were also seized.

A militant of the banned United National Liberation Front (P) was arrested from Ngariyan Ching area of Imphal East district on Thursday for being involved in extortion activities, police said. Forces arrested a cadre of Kangleipak Communist Party (City Meitei) from Ngaikhong Khullen area in Bishnupur district and a cadre of KCP (PWG) from Pheidinga in Imphal West district.

The arrested people were taken to Impha. Police also arrested one active cadre of the KYKL involved in extortion activity from Kakching Sumak Leikai area in Kakching district. Meanwhile, protestors burnt tyres in the middle of roads and forced shops to close to protest the arrest of village volunteers. Security personnel had arrested more than 10 village volunteers in an early morning operation at Panjao Pallumda in the district.

The arrests came a day after Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla urged people to voluntarily surrender looted and illegally held weapons within seven days, asserting that "strict action" would be taken after the expiry of the deadline. *—PTI*

**TEXTS AT NIGHT**

# *'Msgs like you're slim, smart, fair to unknown woman is obscenity'*

**MUMBAI, 21 FEB**

A sessions court in Mumbai has ruled that sending unsolicited messages to a woman late at night, including comments like "you are slim, look very smart and fair, I like you," constitutes obscenity. The observation was made by Additional Sessions Judge DG Dhoble while upholding the conviction of a man for sending obscene WhatsApp messages to a former corporator.

The incident in question involved messages sent between 11pm and 12.30am, which included statements such as "my age is 40 years" and inquiries about the complainant's marital status. The court emphasised that no reputable married woman or her husband, especially those with public standing like former corporators, would tolerate such unsolicited communications from a stranger.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The judge asserted that the messages represented an insult to the dignity and modesty of the woman, underscoring the need to evaluate obscenity through the lens of "average persons applying contemporary community standards." The accused had previously been convicted by a magistrate court in 2022, receiving a three-month prison sentence, which he contested, claiming false implications due to political rivalry. The sessions court dismissed this claim, citing a lack of supporting evidence. The ruling reinforces that the prosecution successfully demonstrated that the accused engaged in inappropriate conduct, concluding that the original conviction and sentence were justified. *—PTI*

## Paper leak allegations spark protest in Jalna

**JALNA, 21 FEB**

Chaos prevailed at an SSC exam centre in Badnapur in Maharashtra's Jalna district on Friday as some persons alleged a leak of the Marathi language question paper, while an official accused a section of agitating parents of pelting stones.

Senior officials, including the district collector, said a probe had been ordered into the allegations.

Sources said the paper was leaked within 15 minutes of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Board exam commencing at the centre located in a Zilla Parishad school.

They claimed the paper was available at a photocopy shop close to the centre, prompting parents to protest. *—PTI*

# UP to supply Sangam water to jail inmates

**LUCKNOW, 21 FEB**

In a significant move, the Uttar Pradesh jail administration has arranged for holy water from the Sangam in Prayagraj to be provided to 75 prisons throughout the state. This initiative aims to allow inmates to partake in this sacred experience during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, which will conclude on 26 February.

UP Jail Minister Dara Singh Chauhan, who oversaw the arrangements at Lucknow Jail, highlighted the importance of this gesture, stating, "While people from across the world can reach the Sangam, inmates from our jails cannot do so. Hence, we decided to provide them with this opportunity."

Over 90,000 inmates are housed in 75 jails across Uttar Pradesh, including seven central prisons. The distribution of holy water provides a unique spiritual experience for the prisoners, enabling them to engage in prayer and reflection during this auspicious time. This initiative underscores a compassionate approach to jail administration during a significant religious event. *—PTI*

> **The potential of Uttar Pradesh which the world is witnessing today can be linked to the Maha Kumbh Mela. The Maha Kumbh alone is going to help the economy of UP grow by over Rs 3 lakh crore**
> -Yogi Adityanath, UP CM

## DANCE FOR THE STARS

The 51st Khajuraho Dance Festival in Madhya Pradesh set a milestone as 139 artists danced for over 24 hours, earning a Guinness World Record for the longest classical dance marathon. The dance marathon began at 2.34pm on Wednesday and ended at 2.43pm on Thursday, continuing non-stop for 24 hours, 9 minutes and 26 seconds. The event, hosted by the MP Department of Culture, saw Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Mohiniyattam, and Odissi performances

***PHOTO: ANI***

# Kenyan HIV+ orphans depend on USAID funds

The decision to freeze USAIDs fundings means access to life-saving HIV treatment to children in Kenya will become unaffordable. The children have almost no other alternatives for treatment ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Two-year-old Evans was brought to the Nyumbani Children's Home in Nairobi, Kenya a year ago, suffering from HIV and tuberculosis. With no family to care for him, Evans was referred to the orphanage by a health center after he stopped responding to medical treatment.

Nyumbani Children's Home is the reason Evans is still alive. But political decisions made thousands of miles away might spell the end of his short life. Nyumbani provides him and around 100 other children with antiretroviral medication, which they have been receiving from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Kenyan government.

US President Donald Trump's recent executive order to freeze USAID's funding means Nyumbani's access to life-saving antiretroviral drugs, which stop the HIV virus from replicating in the body, may end soon.

Trump's order seeks to review almost all US foreign aid for 90 days and his administration has moved to shut down USAID. The effects are beginning to set it in, with thousands of people losing their jobs globally and humanitarian programs around the world disrupted.

For children at Nyumbani Children's Home, it's a life and death situation.

As he plays with other preschoolers, Evans is oblivious to his uncertain future, despite the worry on his caregivers' faces.

The tiny graves at one end of the orphanage compound are a bleak reminder of what a future without USAID looks like for the children. It's a scenario Sister Tresa Palakudy — who has been looking after children for 28 years — is well familiar with having worked at the orphanage before USAID started helping.

"When we started caring for them, they didn't look like they had life in them," she said. "One after another, they died. It was so painful, and I don't want to see that happen again."

When Nyumbani, which means "Home" in Swahili, was started in 1992 by Christian missionaries, antiretroviral medication had not been introduced. Back then, it operated as a rescue center for orphaned and abandoned children living with HIV, offering largely palliative care.

The 2003 inception of the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, provided new hope for children living with HIV around the continent. PEPFAR's humanitarian aid to combat HIV in Kenya was funded largely by USAID.

"USAID started bringing ARVs free of charge," said Palakudy. "We put all our children on ARVs and their lives changed. They became healthy and were able to go to school and live like other children."

Direct funding from USAID was discontinued in 2023, about the same time the orphanage came under scrutiny over allegations of sexual abuse of children by volunteers and staff members.

The policy change affected all organizations receiving funding. Rather than giving money directly to non-governmental organizations, funding would be channeled through government programs that catered to similar needs. As a result, Nyumbani scaled down its outreach programs and referred beneficiaries to government institutions. However, Nyumbani has still been reliant on USAID to supply the lifesaving PEPFAR HIV treatment drugs for free.

"The future is uncertain," said Wamboye. "The Kenyan government announced that they only have ARV stocks to last six months."

According to data from amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, about 1.3 million people are on HIV/AIDS treatment in Kenya, and 1,602 orphans and vulnerable children in Kenya are dependent on PEPFAR.

One such child is Mercy, who has been under the care of Nyumbani for the last 12 years.

"Now that I have finished high school and am ready to join college, I am scared it will ruin everything," she said.

On average, the children's home requires $1,139 per child annually for HIV treatment.

Executive Director Judith Wamboye said that if PEPFAR is discontinued, it will mean children living with HIV will die. "This is a life-saving situation and we cannot sit and wait and bargain on human life. Something needs to be done urgently." *—PTI*

## LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

# SALAR

## Many migrants in Germany to vote for the 1st time

More than half a million newly naturalised citizens will have the opportunity to vote in a German national election for the first time this weekend.

Almost a third of the new Germans are originally from Syria. Most of them left their home countries in the last decade, fleeing war, political instability and economic hardship. In 2015-2016 alone, more than 1 million migrants came to Germany, most from Syria, but also from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since the last national election in 2021, the number of naturalisations in Germany has risen sharply: More than 500,000 people were naturalized between 2021 and 2023, according to the country's Federal Statistical Office. While the numbers for 2024 are not yet available, experts estimate that at least 250,000 people were naturalized last year.

Many of the new citizens who will vote for the first time in Germany on Sunday have expressed a mix of excitement, hope for change, and a feeling of empowerment about their voting rights. Some worry about the rise of the far-right, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany, or AfD, party.

For the new Germans originally from Syria, the election is weighted with extra significance. Many of them fled their country because of the civil war that followed former president Bashar Assad's crackdown on protests calling for greater democratic freedom. He was toppled in November, but whether Syria will now become a democracy remains unclear. In the meantime, they are able to vote in multi-party elections in their new home.

Logeen Faour Shahna, 24, wants to give other migrants a voice

Originally from Idlib in Syria, Faour Shahna arrived in 2015 and is now studying mathematics at Berlin's Technical University. She says her new German passport gives her a sense of security as she is now no longer afraid of being deported. She wants to go vote on Sunday, "because every vote counts."

"It may be that others still see me as a foreigner, but I also want to show that not everyone is the same. You should not see us as foreigners, but as human beings, and you should see what we will do for the German state in the future. I am clearly against AfD. I think there are also many others who are against AfD, whether they were born as foreigners or whether they are German. I don't think they'll ever rule Germany. Otherwise we would be back in the 1930s."

Syamend Al Othman, 31, hopes the next government will boost the economy

Al Othman, a Syrian Kurd, came to Germany in 2014. He currently works in online marketing but dreams of opening his own coffee place in Berlin. He says he and his wife are just like other Germans, working, paying their taxes, not committing any crimes, and visiting family on weekends. He hopes that the next government can make sure that "Germany's economy will get better again."

"This is my first national election after becoming a German. Of course it has a lot of meaning for me that my wife and I have an influence on German elections, that we also decide who governs us."

Ketevan Asatiani-Hermann, 35, says voting is more important than ever as democracy is under threat

Asatiani-Hermann came to Germany from Georgia, in the Caucasus, in 2011 and was naturalised in October. She is married to a German and lives in Magdeburg, where she has a job as a social worker helping migrant teenagers integrate in society. She voiced concern that discrimination of migrants may further grow after a deadly attack by a Saudi physician on a Christmas market in Magdeburg that killed six and injured more than 200.

"I have never felt before that democracy is under such threat. This is a very good time for me to perhaps contribute with my vote to ensure that people vote for democracy and that hate and racism are not promoted. It also gives me a sense of affirmation and that I'm allowed to have a say."

Sedra Hanina, 23, wants Germany to provide more security especially for women wearing hijab

Hanina came from Damascus in 2016, when she was 15 years old. She's married, has one daughter, and studies chemistry in Berlin

""I hope there will be more of a focus on social justice, integration, and freedom of people, that everyone is treated the same as everyone else, no matter where you come from, how you look, and how you act. The main thing is that everyone is treated equally." *—PTI*

Estimates say at least 7.5 lakh people were naturalised in Germany since 2021 ***PHOTO: PTI***

# *New FBI director Kash Patel has roots in Gujarat's Anand district*

- Kash Patel's family moved back to India from Uganada in the 1970s. They then briefly shifted to Canada before settling in the United States of America in the 1980s, where Kash Patel was born.

Kash Patel, the new FBI director is part of the Pattidar community in Gujurat. He had served as the Chief of Staff to the Acting Secretary of Defence earlier ***PHOTO: X***

Indian-American Kash Patel, confirmed by the US Senate to head the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), traces his roots to Bhadran village in Gujarat's Anand district, from where his family migrated to Uganda 70 to 80 years ago, his community members said on Friday.

New York-born Patel, 44, who belongs to the Patidar community, has become the first Indian-American to lead the premier law enforcement agency of the United States.

Leaders of the Patidar community said all close family members of Patel are settled in foreign countries. They sold their ancestral houses in Bhadran once they shifted to Africa.

Chh Gam Patidar Mandal, an organisation of the community based in Anand, maintains *vanshavali* (family tree) of its members.

"In the *vanshavali* we have names of Kash Patel's father Pramod Patel and also his brothers and grandfather," said secretary of the organisation and Anand district BJP present Rajesh Patel.

Rajesh Patel told PTI that though Kash Patel's name was yet to be added to the family tree, entry of 18 generations of his family are there in the *vanshavali* and is stored in their office along with all members of their community.

"As per our records the family used to live in Moti Khadki area of Bhadran village and they migrated to Uganda some 70 to 80 years ago," he informed.

"The family sold their ancestral house and land and all of his relatives are settled in foreign countries, especially in the USA," Rajesh Patel added.

"Now, when a family member of Kash comes back to India we will seek their permission to record their next generation's names, including his own name, in *vanshavali*," Rajesh Patel noted.

"We have not met Kash Patel as the family has not visited Anand in recent years. But many in our community know them as Patidar is a close-knit community," he said.

Rajesh Patel said as far as he knows, the family had returned for a brief time to India after their expulsion from the African country in the 1970s.

"Those Indians who were expelled from Uganda had come to India for a brief stay as they had applied for asylum in the UK, US or Canada. Kash Patel's family had also come here for a brief stopover and then moved to Canada once their applications were accepted," he said.

From Canada, they shifted to the US, where Kash Patel was born in 1980, Rajesh Patel maintained.

Indians who migrated to Uganda were expelled from the African country by dictator Idi Amin who seized power in a military coup in 1971. In 1972, he ordered the Indian community to leave his country in 90 days.

Chh Gam Patidar Mandal is an organization of the Patidar community from six villages or towns of Anand district -- Dharmaj, Nadiad, Sojitra, Bhadran, Vaso and Karamsad.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first home minister of the country, hailed from Karamsad.

The new FBI chief served as the former Chief of Staff to Acting Secretary of Defence Christopher Miller. He was responsible for leading the Secretary's mission at the Department, including his executive staff and providing counsel to him on all matters concerning its operations, the US Department of Defence's short biography on Kash Patel said.

A native of New York, Kash Patel completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Richmond before returning to New York to earn his law degree, along with a Certificate in International Law from University College London Faculty of Laws in the United Kingdom, it said.

Kash Patel, a trained lawyer, is an ice-hockey fan and has been playing the sport since he was six, it said.

"We are Gujarati," he had told PTI in an earlier interview in the United States. *—PTI*

Anand district highlighted on a map of Gujurat. The Patidar community hails from six villages in the district ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

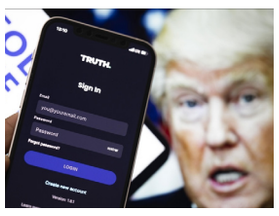



PHOTO: X

## Truth Social was never available in Ukraine: Ministry

**KYIV, 21 FEB**

Reports of Truth Social, US President Donald Trump's social media platform, being blocked across Ukraine are false, a Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman said. Earlier, social media users claimed they were unable to login, encountering a message that read "Truth Social is currently unavailable in your region." Ukraine Foreign Ministry spokesman Heorhii Tykhyi addressed the issue on X, saying "We have seen reports suggesting that access to the Truth Social network has been blocked in Ukraine. These reports are false. Ukraine did not and could not block access because, unfortunately, Truth Social has never made itself available in Ukraine." The issue comes a day after Trump labelled Zelenskyy a "modestly successful comedian". *—Agencies*

## US deports 177 Venezuelan illegal migrants

**WASHINGTON DC, 21 FEB**

The United States has sent 177 Venezuelan illegal migrants from the Washington-controlled military base in Guantanamo to Venezuela. Venezuelan authorities took custody of the deportees from Soto Cano – a joint US-Honduras military airbase – before flying them to Caracas on a flag carrier Conviasa flight. Venezuela's Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello was at the airport when the plane landed, and boarded the aircraft to welcome the arrivals. President Nicolas Maduro said the handover was the result of a "direct request" from his government to the US and added that his countrymen were "rescued". The Department of Homeland Security said among those released were 126 individuals with criminal charges or convictions. *—Agencies*

## Student protesters in Belgrade garner mass support

**BELGRADE, 21 FEB**

Thousands flooded the streets of Serbia's capital on Thursday in a noisy support rally for protesting university students and their months-long struggle against corruption and for changes in the Balkan country. Belgrade residents organised in five columns from various parts of the city before marching to an intersection where the students have been holding their daily blockades for more than two months. President Aleksandar Vucic has accused the students of acting under foreign orders. With their demands for justice over the collapse of a concrete canopy that killed 15 people in November, the students have gained significant support from citizens. *—PTI*

## Ugandan leader Besigye charged with treason

**KAMPALA, 21 FEB**

Ugandan opposition figure Kizza Besigye was charged with treason on Friday in an escalation of legal troubles stemming from allegations he plotted to remove the country's long-time leader by force. The four-time presidential candidate sat in a wheelchair in a courtroom in the capital, Kampala. Treason carries the death penalty in Uganda. Besigye has been in custody since 16 November, when he went missing in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi. Days later, he was presented before a military tribunal in Kampala, accused of threatening national security. The Supreme Court stopped his military trial last month, saying court-martial panels cannot try civilians. Besigye's family, supporters and others wanted him freed, but he was kept in a maximum-security prison and later started a hunger strike. *—PTI*

# US Senate approves Patel as new FBI chief

### Confirmed with a narrow margin, first Indian-American at the helm vows to 'rebuild trust'

Kash Patel welcomed as FBI director with Ranveer Singh's song Malhari

**NEW YORK, 21 FEB**

New FBI director Kash Patel has vowed to "rebuild" trust in the bureau as he becomes the first Indian-American to lead the country's premier law enforcement agency after being confirmed by the US Senate.

The Republican-led Senate narrowly voted to confirm 44-year-old Patel on Thursday. The Senate voted 51 to 49 to confirm Patel. Two Republicans, Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski, voted against his confirmation.

The nomination faced intense scrutiny from Democrats on Capitol Hill who have warned that Patel is poised to use the position to seek retribution against Donald Trump's perceived political enemies.

In his confirmation hearings, Patel also denied keeping a list of "deep state" enemies, while playing down controversial past remarks he had made such as referring to law enforcement officials who investigated Trump as "criminal gangsters".

After his confirmation, Patel posted on X," I am honoured to be confirmed as the ninth Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Thank you to President Trump and Attorney General Bondi for your unwavering confidence and support."

"The FBI has a storied legacy – from the "G-Men" to safeguarding our nation in the wake of 9/11. The American people deserve an FBI that is transparent, accountable and committed to justice. The politicisation of our justice system has eroded public trust – but that ends today. My mission as Director is clear: let good cops be cops – and rebuild trust in the FBI," he said.

He also warned that the agency would hunt down those who seek to harm Americans.

He was the 18th Cabinet official approved by lawmakers since Trump was inaugurated a month ago.

Patel takes the helm of an FBI in flux after the justice department forced out some of its top officials and demanded the names of agents who investigated the 2021 riot by Trump supporters at the US Capitol.

Patel replaces Christopher Wray whom Trump picked in 2017. Wray resigned after Trump indicated he would fire him. *—PTI*

### PROFILE OF KASH PATEL

- **Born:** 25 February, 1980, in Garden City, New York
- Born to Indian Gujarati immigrant parents
- **Education:** University of Richmond (BA); Pace University (Juris Doctor)

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

- Anti-terrorism work at the Department of Justice
- Senior aide to Rep. Devin Nunes on the House Intelligence Committee
- Roles in the National Security Council and Department of Defence under Trump

**PRIORITIES**

- Restoring public trust
- Tackling terrorism and espionage threats, especially from China
- FBI is looking major budget cut under Patel

**CONTROVERSIES**

- Criticised ties to conspiracy theories like QAnon and unfounded claims about election fraud
- Keeping an 'enemies list' that FBI could target
- Allegations of sharing classified information
- Pledged to maintain an apolitical FBI
- The move is also seen as his entry to politics

## TRUMP TIRED OF ZELENSKYY BLOCKING EFFORTS TO END WAR

**WASHINGTON, 21 FEB**

A top White House official has said that President Donald Trump's increasingly tough criticism of Volodymyr Zelenskyy reflects the administration's growing frustration with what they see as the Ukrainian leader creating roadblocks to finding an endgame to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The comments from White House national security adviser Mike Waltz on Thursday came a day after Trump described Zelenskyy as a "dictator" and warned that he "better move fast" to negotiate an end to the war or risk not having a nation to lead. Zelenskyy earlier Wednesday had said Trump was living in a Russian-made "disinformation space".

"His frustration with President Zelenskyy that you heard is multifold," Waltz said Thursday of Trump. *—PTI*

### PLEA IN COURT TO STOP FREEZING FUNDS

US District Court Judge John McConnell in Rhode Island will on Friday consider a request to block President Donald Trump administration from freezing trillions of dollars of grants and loans. He has already approved a temporary restraining order on the funding freeze.

### COSTA RICA, HONDURAS HOST US DEPORTEES

A flight of 135 deportees added Costa Rica to a growing list of Latin American nations to serve as a stopover for migrants being thrown out by Trump's administration. Also joining the league was Honduras, which on Thursday hosted a batch of US deportees heading to Venezuela.

> **Hamas act of returning an unidentified body in place of the mother of two murdered boys is a new low, an evil and cruelty with no parallel.**
>
> — Danny Danon, Israel's UN Ambassador

## Musk to 'fix' X after polls show support for Zelenskyy

**WASHINGTON DC, 21 FEB**

Elon Musk has pledged to "fix" X's fact-checking tool following the release of poll results contradicting United States President Donald Trump's claim that Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy is deeply unpopular in his country.

Rowing in behind Trump's attacks on Zelenskyy on Thursday, Musk claimed that his social media platform's "community notes" feature was being "gamed" by governments and traditional media.

Meanwhile, Brazil's Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes has ordered X to pay USD 1.4M in fines for failing to comply with judicial orders, according to a judicial ruling. *—PTI*

**PRUNING THE SYSTEM**

Elon Musk at a conservative gathering, waving a chainsaw in the air, showing his openness to auditing the Federal Reserve and accusing Democrats of treason. The chainsaw was engraved with Milei's slogan, "Viva la libertad, carajo," which is Spanish for "Long live liberty, damn it" ***PHOTO: X***

PHOTO: X

## Aus warns of Chinese drills in Tasman Sea

**MELBOURNE, 21 FEB**

- Airservices Australia issued the warning to commercial pilots, after which several international flights were diverted, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported

Australia warned international airlines flying between Australian airports and New Zealand to beware of Chinese warships conducting a live-fire exercise in the Tasman Sea, Foreign Minister Penny Wong said on Friday.

Wong also confirmed an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) report that regulator Airservices Australia had warned commercial pilots of a potential hazard in airspace between the countries as three Chinese warships conduct exercises off the Australian east coast.

Several international flights were diverted as a result, the ABC reported.

"It would be normal practice where a task group is engaging in exercises for there to be advice given to vessels and aircraft in the area and Airservices Australia is doing what it should do, which is to give that advice," Wong told the ABC.

Australia was discussing with China about the notification and transparency around its naval exercises, "particularly live-fire exercises," Wong said.

Australian military ships and planes have been monitoring the Chinese warships for days as they pass in international waters off the Australian east coast. *—PTI*

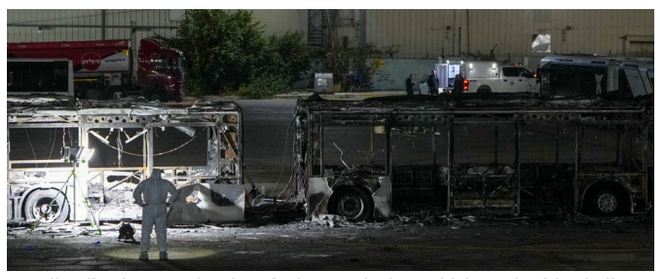
# Bibi orders crackdown in West Bank

**TEL AVIV, 21 FEB**

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday ordered his military to conduct operations in the occupied West Bank after three empty buses exploded, in an act of suspected terror attack, near Tel Aviv on Thursday night.

No casualties were reported and there was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blasts, which occurred when explosives planted on the empty vehicles detonated in quick succession in the cities of Bat Yam and Holon, south of Israel's financial centre.

In Bat Yam, two bombs exploded on buses parked in a depot on Thursday night, authorities said. A third blast was reported in Holon from an explosive device planted on a third bus.



Israeli police inspect the site of a bus explosion, which authorities believe to be a militant attack, at Bat Yam in central Israel ***PHOTO: PTI***

The CNN reported that Israel stepped up security and halted bus and train operations across the country following the blasts, which a statement from Netanyahu's office called an "attempt to perpetrate a chain of mass bus bombings." Netanyahu "ordered the IDF to carry out an intensive operation against centres of terrorism," in the West Bank, according to the statement.

"The Prime Minister also ordered the Israel Police and the Israel Security Agency to increase preventative activity against additional attacks in Israeli cities," it added.

Earlier, Israel's Defence minister Israel Katz said that he instructed the IDF to ramp up its operations in the West Bank. *—ANI*

## Hamas released body of wrong woman: Israel

**JERUSALEM, 21 FEB**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday said one of the four bodies that Hamas militants released during the handover of remains of Israeli hostages on Thursday is that of a Gazan woman instead of that of Shiri Bibas, the mother of two young boys whose bodies were returned on Thursday.

Netanyahu criticised the handover of the wrong remains as a "cruel and malicious violation" of the ceasefire agreement and said Hamas would "pay the full price" for the action. *—PTI*

## Rushdie murder attempt trial nears end

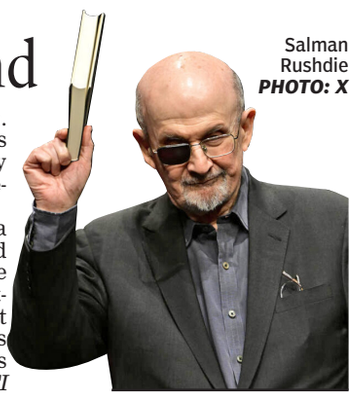
**MAYVILLE, 21 FEB**

Lawyers are set to deliver their closing arguments Friday in the trial of a New Jersey man charged with trying to kill Salman Rushdie on a New York lecture stage in a knife attack that left the author blind in one eye and with other serious injuries.

Hadi Matar, 27, is charged with attempted murder and assault in the August 2022 attack at the Chautauqua Institution in western New York. He faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted.

Rushdie, 77, was the key witness during testimony that began last week. The Booker Prize-winning author told jurors he thought he was dying when a masked stranger ran onto the stage and stabbed and slashed at him until being tackled by bystanders. Rushdie showed jurors his now-blinded right eye, usually hidden behind a darkened eyeglass lens.

Jurors also heard from a trauma surgeon who said Rushdie's injuries would have been fatal without quick treatment, and a law enforcement officer who said Matar was calm and cooperative in his custody. *—PTI*



Salman Rushdie ***PHOTO: X***

**PRODDED BY TRUMP**

# *Canada labels seven cartels as terrorists*

**OTTAWA, 21 FEB**

Canada is designating seven Latin American criminal organisations as terrorist entities under the country's Criminal Code, giving Canadian law enforcement another tool in the fight against fentanyl trafficking, Public Safety Minister David McGuinty has said.

The list includes Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel, Jalisco New Generation Cartel and La Nueva Familia Michoacana, and was announced a day after the US government formally designated eight Latin American organized crime groups as "foreign terrorist organisations".

"The measures will help keep fentanyl off Canadian streets and from entering the United States," McGuinty told a news conference.

US border patrol statistics show that only less than 1 per cent of all fentanyl seized is found at the northern border ***PHOTO: X***

The announcement was Canada's latest response to US President Donald Trump's claim that the flow of fentanyl and illegal immigration into the US were behind his threats of imposing a 25 per cent tariff on all Canadian goods – with the exception of 10 per cent on energy.

Trump has paused the implementation of those tariffs until at least March 4.

US border patrol statistics show that less than 1 per cent of all fentanyl seized is found at the northern border. But Canadian officials have expressed a willingness to do more to combat the deadly synthetic opioid.

The other organisations designated as terrorist groups are Cartel del Golfo and Carteles Unidos, also from Mexico; Tren de Aragua, in Venezuela, and the Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, which started in California but became a dominant criminal force in El Salvador.

The designation effectively freezes a group's assets and property.

"Banks and brokerages will freeze these entities' assets, which can then be the subject of seizure, restraint or forfeiture," said McGuinty. *—PTI*

## Will Pope resign? Question pops up as Francis improves

**ROME, 21 FEB**

Pope Francis marked the one-week point on Friday in his hospital stay, getting up to eat breakfast as the 88-year-old pontiff continued fighting pneumonia and a complex respiratory infection, the Vatican said.

According to the one-line morning bulletin on Friday, "The night went well, this morning Pope Francis got up and had breakfast."

However, on Thursday, some of Francis' cardinals began to respond to a question circulating: whether Francis might resign if he becomes irreversibly sick and unable to carry on. Francis has said he would consider it, after Pope Benedict XVI "opened the door" to popes retiring.

"Everything is possible," said Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline, the archbishop of Marseille, France.

Pope Francis ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Another cardinal, Gianfranco Ravasi, was asked if Francis might decide to follow in the footsteps of Pope Benedict XVI and step down if he becomes too ill.

"There is no question that if he (Francis) was in a situation where his ability to have direct contact (with people) as he likes to do ... was compromised, then I think he might decide to resign," Ravasi was quoted as telling RTL 102.5 radio. *—PTI*

## Gold drops by Rs 700, silver falls by Rs 300

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Gold prices retreated from the record high level in the national capital on Friday, declining by Rs 700 to Rs 88,750 per 10 grams due to weak demand from jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity hit a record high of Rs 89,450 per 10 grams on Thursday. Taking a breather, gold of 99.5 per cent purity depreciated by Rs 700 to Rs 88,350 per 10 grams due to poor demand from jewellers, traders said. Weak global trends aided losses, they said. Silver prices also slipped by Rs 300 to Rs 1 lakh per kg. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

## Rupee falls 7 paise to close at 86.71 against US dollar

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

The rupee pared initial gains and settled 7 paise lower at 86.71 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by sustained foreign fund outflows and a recovery in the American currency index. Forex traders said the Indian rupee declined on Friday on weak domestic markets and a recovery in the US dollar index. However, weak crude oil prices cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a positive note at 86.50 against the greenback. During the session it pared the gains and fell to an intra-day low of 86.77 before ending the session at 86.71 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 7 paise from its previous close. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.22 per cent higher at 106.61. *—PTI*

## EMT, Korea Tourism team up to attract Indian tourists

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Travel tech platform Easy Trip Planners Ltd on Friday said it has signed an initial pact with the Korea Tourism Organisation to enhance South Korea's visibility as a key outbound destination for Indian travellers. The partnership seeks to drive Indian tourist arrivals to Korea by leveraging EaseMyTrip's digital reach, industry expertise, and extensive customer base, Easy Trip Planners, which operates under the brand EaseMyTrip, said in a regulatory filing. Through a targeted marketing approach, EaseMyTrip and Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) will work together to increase awareness, improve accessibility, and create seamless travel experiences for Indian travelers exploring Korea, it added. The two organisations will also launch co-funded marketing campaigns, to ensure widespread visibility and deeper engagement in the Indian travel market. *—PTI*

## Bajaj Electricals gets Rs 14.08 cr GST demand

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Bajaj Electricals Ltd on Friday said it has received a demand of Rs 14.08 crore from GST authority in Punjab for alleged mismatch in input tax credit (ITC) claimed by it. In a regulatory filing, Bajaj Electricals Ltd said it has received an assessment order dated February 20, 2025, from the Office of the Assistant Commissioner, Mohali, Punjab alleging liability on reverse charge mechanism, a mismatch in the input tax credit (ITC) claimed by it during FY 2020-21. The company is currently exploring various legal options and necessary steps, including filing an appeal before the relevant appellate authority, the filing said, adding there is no impact on financial operations or any other activities due to this. *—PTI*

# Auto stocks fall 6% amid new EV policy buzz

### The development comes as Tesla Inc accelerates its plans to enter Indian market by April

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Shares of Tata Motors, Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M), and Hyundai Motor India fell by up to 6 percent on Friday amid reports that the Indian government may relax electric vehicle (EV) import rules. The potential policy shift is expected to pave the way for increased competition from foreign automakers, posing a challenge to domestic players.

M&M shares experienced their largest single-day drop in nearly seven months, closing at Rs 2,653. Tata Motors' shares declined by 2 per cent to Rs 676, while Hyundai Motor India saw a 2.5 per cent dip, trading at Rs 1,875.

The development comes as Tesla Inc. accelerates its plans to enter the Indian market. Sources revealed that Tesla is likely to introduce its vehicles through direct imports rather than committing to local manufacturing in the near term. To facilitate Tesla's entry, the Indian government is reportedly considering reducing import duties on EVs along with easing other import norms. The move could attract more global EV manufacturers, signaling a shift in policy aimed at integrating India into the global EV supply chain.

Indian government is reportedly considering reducing import duties on EVs along with easing other import norms **PHOTO: PTI**

Currently, fully built EVs priced above $40,000 are subject to a Basic Customs Duty (BCD) of 70 percent, along with a 40 percent Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC), resulting in an effective import duty of 110 percent. EVs priced below $40,000 continue to attract a 70 per cent duty.

Despite concerns about heightened competition, Geojit Financial has suggested that Tesla may struggle to compete with M&M in terms of pricing, distribution, and after-sales services.

Following these developments, the Nifty Auto index fell 2.5 percent to 21,534 at around 11 am, with Tata Motors, M&M, Hyundai Motor India, Maruti Suzuki, and Bajaj Auto leading the decline. The Nifty Auto index has dropped nearly 6 percent since the beginning of the year, reflecting the uncertainty surrounding the domestic auto sector. *—Agencies*

## Mkts fall for 4th day dragged by auto stocks

**MUMBAI, 21 FEB**

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday, dragged by auto stocks and relentless foreign fund outflows.

Weak US markets and tariff threats also dented investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dropped 424.90 points or 0.56 per cent to settle at 75,311.06.

During the day, it tanked 623.55 points or 0.82 per cent to 75,112.41.

The NSE Nifty declined 117.25 points or 0.51 per cent to 22,795.90.

In four trading days, the BSE bellwether gauge tumbled 685.8 points or 0.90 per cent while the Nifty declined 163.6 points or 0.71 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, Mahindra & Mahindra tanked over 6 per cent.

Adani Ports, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Zomato, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.

Tata Steel, Larsen & Toubro, HCL Tech, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank and NTPC were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,311.55 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

**MKT MANIPULATION ROW**

# Buch: No need to address small, midcap slump

**MUMBAI, 21 FEB**

SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch on Friday said there is "no need" for the capital markets regulator to comment on the recent steep correction in small and midcap stocks.

Drawing from her statement in March last year on the high valuations in the same stocks, Buch said SEBI had flagged its concerns on the high valuations when it saw a need for it.

"On midcaps and small caps, I think that at a point in time when the regulator felt the need to make a statement about it, the statement was made. Today, the regulator feels no need to make an additional statement," she said speaking at an AMFI event here.

It can be noted that the small and midcap stocks are in bear territory lately, with some scrips declining by over 20 per cent in quick succession.

In March 2024, in what is a rare comment from the regulator, Buch had flagged concerns about the high valuations in the two segments.

Madhabi Puri Buch **PHOTO: PTI**

"There are pockets of froth in the market. Some people call it a bubble, some may call it froth. It may not be appropriate to allow that froth to keep building," she had said.

Meanwhile, Buch also said that the regulator has no intention of making it compulsory for fund houses to launch the recently introduced Rs 250 systematic investment plan. *—PTI*

## INDIA, UK TO RESUME FTA TALKS SOON

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

India and the United Kingdom are set to relaunch negotiations on the long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA), sources told ANI.

As part of the discussions, UK Minister for Trade Douglas Alexander is expected to visit India next week and meet Union Minister for Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal.

The two leaders will discuss ways to accelerate the FTA talks, which have been under negotiation for a long time. The agreement aims to enhance trade and investment between both countries by reducing tariffs and easing market access for businesses.

India and the UK have been working towards a comprehensive trade deal that could boost economic cooperation in key sectors such as goods, services, technology, and investment. The upcoming discussions between Alexander and Goyal are expected to address key concerns and find common ground to move the negotiations forward.

Following a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of G20 Summit in Brazil, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced the relaunch of FTA talks between United Kingdom and India in 2025. *—ANI*

# Indian banks to face margin squeeze amid RBI rate cuts

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Indian banks are grappling with increased pressure on their net interest margins (NIMs) following the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) first benchmark rate cut in nearly five years. S&P Capital IQ reports that NIMs at the six largest private and state-owned banks have come under stress as deposit rates have aligned more closely with lending rates in recent quarters. Nonetheless, robust credit demand has allowed these banks to sustain growth.

In the October-December quarter of FY24, five of the six major banks recorded loan growth exceeding 12 per cent, enhancing their year-over-year net income. The RBI's recent moves include liquidity measures and a 25-basis-point cut in the benchmark repo rate to 6.25 per cent on 7 February.

However, with deposit rates remaining high amidst tight liquidity, borrowers are likely to push for reduced lending rates, further pressuring banks' margins. The State Bank of India (SBI), the largest lender, reported a NIM decline of 17 basis points year-on-year to 2.86 per cent for Q3 FY24, though it experienced credit growth of 14 per cent. Other banks, such as Bank of Baroda and Punjab National Bank, also faced margin declines as competition for deposits heats up. *—ANI*

- In the October-December quarter of FY24, five of the six major banks recorded loan growth exceeding 12 per cent, enhancing their year-over-year net income

## RBI warns on reckless financialisation

**MUMBAI, 21 FEB**

Amid concerns emanating from spurt in unsecured lending and an euphoria in derivatives, Reserve Bank Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao on Friday asked financial sector entities to guard against "reckless financialisation".

Speaking at an event in stock exchange NSE here, Rao said the "temptation" of short-term gains can easily overshadow the long-term financial security for individuals.

Rao said RBI is working with other financial sector regulators to educate customers, and added that it is the absence of financial literacy due to which people fall prey to unscrupulous players.

The large-scale adoption of AI has a potential to increase the number of jobs, Rao said, adding that it is the nature of the jobs which will change. *—PTI*

# Adani Group to invest ₹30,000 cr in Kerala in 5 years

**KOCHI, 21 FEB**

Adani Group will invest Rs 30,000 crore in Kerala in the next five years, a top executive said on Friday.

The diversified group that is developing the Vizhinjam port and operating the airport at Thiruvananthapuram, will be developing a logistics and e-commerce hub as well as expanding its cement manufacturing capacity in the state.

The group is developing the Vizhinjam port and has already invested Rs 5,000 crore.

In total, Adani said the group will invest Rs 30,000 crore in the next five years in Kerala.

Meanwhile, highlighting the growth potential in the state, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday said changes happening in the state are substantial and efforts are on to ensure an investor-friendly architecture.

Inaugurating the Invest Kerala Global Summit (IKGS) here, he said every nerve will be strained and no stone will be left unturned to make the state an investment destination.

He also said that, Kerala aims to have 15,000 startups and create 1 lakh employment opportunities by 2026.

> **Kerala aim to establish 15,000 startups and create one lakh employment opportunities by 2026**
>
> -Pinarayi Vijayan, Kerala Chief Minister

He also said the state has identified 22 priority sectors and that the focus of the industrial policy is nature, people and industry.

The two-day summit is expected to see around 3,000 participants. *—PTI*

# Meta execs to get 200% bonuses amid layoffs

**CALIFORNIA, 21 FEB**

Meta executives are set to receive significantly higher bonuses this year following changes to the company's executive bonus plan, according to a corporate filing on Thursday.

Under the revised structure, Meta's top executives will now be eligible for bonuses of up to 200 per cent of their base salary, a sharp increase from the previous 75 per cent.

However, the changes do not apply to CEO Mark Zuckerberg, according to the filing. The decision was approved by a committee of Meta's board of directors on 13 February, after determining that executive compensation was "at or below the 15th percentile" compared to similar roles at competing companies. The adjustment is intended to bring total target cash compensation for Meta's senior executives — excluding Zuckerberg — in line with the 50th percentile of industry peers.

PHOTO:ANI

The announcement follows Meta's recent decision to lay off 5 per cent of its workforce. *—Agencies*

## 'India must have 'Zero for Zero' to counter US tariff'

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

India should propose a 'zero-for-zero' tariff strategy to the US for addressing America's proposed reciprocal tariff hikes, as it would be less harmful than negotiating a full bilateral trade agreement, economic think tank GTRI said in its report on Friday.

In lieu of that, the US should also remove duties on a similar number of goods.

India can exclude most agriculture items from this list and to prepare it, India can refer to its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) tariff offers to Japan, Korea, and ASEAN as starting point, it said. *—PTI*

**MUSCULOSKELETAL BOT**

# *EERIE PROTOCLONE BOT* has muscles, bones & it bleeds

A clone torso sharing a hug with one of its developers **PHOTO: X**

**Clone Robotics, a Polish startup, has unveiled Protoclone, a faceless musculoskeletal android designed to mimic human movements with astonishing realism. Equipped with over 1,000 synthetic muscles and 500 sensors, Protoclone's lifelike motions are powered by a bio-inspired cooling system that mimics sweating.**

### INTRODUCTION

- **LAUNCHED BY:** Polish Startup, Clone Robotics.
- **PRODUCT LAUNCHED:** Protoclone – a faceless musculoskeletal android.
- **KEY FEATURE:** Lifelike movements and can 'bleed to death' if punctured.

### DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

**APPEARANCE:** Faceless, with translucent skin revealing synthetic muscles.

**HEIGHT**
6 FEET

**SENSORS & MUSCLES:** Over 500 sensors
1,000 MYOFIBER
muscles for intricate, human-like movements.

**COOLING SYSTEM:**
Bio-inspired water-based system that mimics sweating to prevent overheating.

**THE SKIN IT LIVES IN:**
Pressurised mesh tubes that contract like human muscles.

### CAPABILITIES & LIMITATIONS

- **MOVEMENTS:** Natural human gait, fluid joint articulation, twitching limbs.
- **LIMITATION:** Cannot walk unaided (unlike competitors Tesla's Optimus and Boston Dynamics' Atlas).
- **PLANNED FUNCTIONS:** Pouring drinks, doing laundry, vacuuming, making sandwiches.

### UNIQUE FEATURES

- **BLEEDING CAPABILITY:** Realistic vascular structure leads to "bleeding" when punctured.
- **UNSETTLING DESIGN:** Faceless look compared to "sleep paralysis demons" by viewers.

### ETHICAL DEBATES

- A potential for job displacement.
- Cybersecurity concerns.
- Psycho-social implications of near-human machines.

PHOTO: X

## India interested in hosting 2030 CWG

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

India is "interested" in hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games and also conducting all those disciplines that were axed from the 2026 edition to ensure that the country's medal tally is not affected when the event is held in Glasgow, a source in the sports ministry said on Friday. "We are interested and a formal interaction has taken place with the Commonwealth Games Federation on this. We have also proposed that all the disciplines that have been removed from the 2026 CWG be held in India," the source said. In a blow to India's medal prospects, key sports such as hockey, badminton, wrestling, cricket, and shooting were dropped from the 2026 edition by host city Glasgow, which announced a pruned roster of 10 disciplines to keep the event budget-friendly. "This has been proposed to ensure that our medal tally does not suffer. An informal proposal has been put across, we will see how the host city responds to it. *—PTI*

## Pune Marathon winner Pradhan fails dope test

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Last year's Pune Half Marathon race title winner Pradhan Vilas Kirulakar has been provisionally suspended by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after failing a dope test. Kirulakar, who had won the Pune Marathon in December 2024 with a time of 1 hour 4 minutes, and 22 seconds, tested positive for performance-enhancing drug meldonium. "A notice of allegation has been issued after his dope sample showed the "presence/use of a prohibited substance (Meldonium) (Article 2.1 and Article 2.2)," the AIU said. The AIU is the independent agency of the World Athletics which manages all aspects of the anti-doping programme for international level athletes.*—PTI*

PHOTO: X

## Cummins eyeing IPL return ahead of WTC Final

**SYDNEY, 21 FEB**

Australian Test captain Pat Cummins is eyeing the upcoming Indian Premier League as his comeback platform from an ankle injury and has expressed confidence in regaining full fitness ahead of the World Test Championship final against South Africa starting 11 June at the Lord's. The 31-year-old, who led Australia to their first Border-Gavaskar Trophy win in more than a decade, battled through pain during the final Test against India in Sydney.*—PTI*

## FIH Pro League: Indian women lose to Germany

**BHUBANESWAR, 21 FEB**

The Indian women's hockey team continued to disappoint as it lost 0-4 to Germany in the FIH Pro League here on Friday. The Germans controlled the match from start to finish, scoring their first three goals all field efforts through Amelie Wortmann (3rd minute) and Sophia Schwabe (18th, 47th) before Johanne Hachenberg converted a penalty corner in the 59th minute. The Germans secured as many as 10 penalty corners in the match as against India's just two.The Germans struck in the third minute through Wortmann, who shot home from a goalmouth melee.*—PTI*

# CT: Ryan shines as SA beat Afghanistan by 107 runs

### Rahmat Shah played a lone hand with a 92-ball 90

Ryan Rickelton celebrates after scoring a century PHOTO: PTI

**NEW DELHI, 21 FEB**

Opening batter Ryan Rickelton struck a flawless maiden century before a clinical display by the bowlers as South Africa began their Champions Trophy campaign with a comprehensive 107-run win over Afghanistan here on Friday.

Rickleton smashed 103 off 106 balls with the help of seven fours and one six while captain Temba Bavuma (58 off 76 balls), Rassie van der Dussen (52 off 46 balls), and Aiden Markram (52 not out off 36 balls) scored half-centuries as South Africa posted 315 for 6 after opting to bat. Rickleton's ton was the tournament's fifth in three days and the third at the National Stadium here.

Chasing a big target of 316, Afghanistan couldn't repeat their series-winning performance of late last year against South Africa when they won the series 2-1 in Sharjah. They were bowled out for 208 in 43.3 overs with South Africa pacers Kagiso Rabada (3/36), Lungi Ngidi (2/56), Wiaan Mulder (2/36), and Marco Jansen (1/32) sharing eight wickets among them as they never allowed Afghanistan to get going in the first 15 overs. The Afghans slipped to 50 for 4 and then to 89 for 5 in the 23rd over. They never recovered from there. Rahmat Shah played a lone hand with a 92-ball 90 while Rashid Khan (18) and Azmatullah Omarzai (18) were the second-highest scorers for Afghanistan who were never in the game after conceding a big total.

**Brief scores**:
South Africa: 315/6 in 50 overs (Ryan Rickelton 103, Temba Bavuma 58, Rassie van der Dussen 52, Aiden Markram 52 not out; Mohammed Nabi 2/51).

Afghanistan: 208 all out in 43.3 overs (Rahmat Shah 90; Lungi Ngidi 2/56, Kagiso Rabada 3/36, Wiaan Mulder 2/36). *—PTI*

## 'SHAMI IS BEST VERSION OF HIMSELF'

**DUBAI, 21 FEB**

Former Australian captain Ricky Ponting hailed the resilience of Mohammed Shami, describing his "fantastic" five-wicket haul in India's Champions Trophy opener as evidence of the fast bowler now being the "best version" of himself following a long injury layoff.

Shami marked his return to ICC tournaments with a brilliant 5 for 53, helping India bowl out Bangladesh for 228 on Thursday. He also became the fastest Indian and the second quickest overall to reach 200 ODI wickets during India's six-wicket victory. "For him to come back, and get five wickets in the first game of the Champions Trophy is fantastic. They are exactly the sort of people you want on your side, the guys who would do anything for you," Ponting told the ICC. "Especially as a captain, you look someone in the eye and ask them to do a job for you, if they are going to do it or they are not and Shami always seems that sort of guy to me that." *—PTI*

# England face Australia as Ashes rivals renew rivalry

**LAHORE, 21 FEB**

Australia vs England Match starts at 2.30 pm IST

An off-color England and an injury-hit Australia will be eager to start their Champions Trophy campaign on a winning note in what seems like an evenly-matched Group B contest between the Ashes rivals here on Saturday.

Both teams have struggled in the ODI format recently, with world champions Australia losing to Sri Lanka (0-2) and Pakistan (1-2) in their last two rubbers.

England, who are now coached by Brendon McCullum in all formats, have not won an ODI series since their disastrous 2023 World Cup campaign.

The Jos Buttler-led side is coming off a 0-3 drubbing by India, where they appeared out of sorts and failed to match up to the hosts.

Both teams will be eager to make their mark in this ICC showpiece event.

Australia had the upper hand against their Ashes rivals the last time they faced off in England, winning a five-match series 3-2 in September last year. However, much has changed since then, with the world champions missing five key players from their initial squad. Their pace attack will be particularly affected, as they will be without their famed trio of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, and Mitchell Starc, all ruled out of the tournament.

They will also be without all-rounders Mitchell Marsh (back injury), Cameron Green (injury), and Marcus Stoinis, who has made a shock retirement from the format after featuring in the initial squad for the tournament.

In such a scenario, it remains to be seen whether Australia, under stand-in skipper Steve Smith, can replicate their past success in what is often referred to as a 'mini' World Cup. With Marsh absent, Smith is likely to come in at No. 3 and will carry the batting workload for a side that won this tournament consecutively in 2006 and 2009.

All eyes will be on explosive white-ball opener Travis Head, who had scores of 101 and 89 at this very venue during their 2022 series.Head also smashed a career-best 154 not out at Trent Bridge against England in last year's series. *—PTI*

## NBA: Giannis returns, leads Bucks past Clippers

**NEW YORK, 21 FEB**

Giannis Antetokounmpo returned following a six-game absence and scored 23 points in 24 minutes as the Milwaukee Bucks beat the visiting Los Angeles Clippers 116-110 on Thursday.

Brook Lopez scored 22 points, Damian Lillard added 15 and Taurean Prince had 14 for Milwaukee, which outscored the Clippers by 15 in the fourth quarter. Kyle Kuzma and Kevin Porter Jr. chipped in 13 points apiece.

Milwaukee played without forward Bobby Portis, who was suspended earlier in the day by the NBA for 25 games for violating the league's anti-drug policy. After sitting out one game with right knee pain. *—PTI*

Vidarbha's players celebrate after winning the Ranji Trophy semi-final against Mumbai PHOTO: PTI

DUBAI FINAL

# Andreeva upsets Rybakina to become WTA 1000 finalist

**DUBAI, 21 FEB**

Mirra Andreeva roared into her first WTA 1000 final on Friday, shocking Elena Rybakina, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships.

The 17-year-old No. backed up a big win over world No. 2 Iga Swiatek to repeat the feat against Rybakina defeating the former world No. 3 and No. 6 seed in two hours and X minutes on Center Court.

Andreeva had been in the midst of a milestone week coming into her first WTA 1000 semifinal, fresh off a strong win over Swiatek, the current world No. 2.

The No. 12 seed has soared up the rankings since last spring when she made her first major semifinal at Roland Garros with a win against then-No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka and won her first WTA title on clay in Romania.

A 2022 Wimbledon champion, Rybakina had played Andreeva just once before, coming back from a set down to win on hard courts at the 2023 China Open, but both have been through much in the 16 months since that Round of 16 clash.

Andreeva is into her first WTA 1000 final after rallying from 1-3 down in the final set over Rybakina PHOTO: X / @_MIRRAANDREEVA_

While Andreeva has credited much of her rise to coach Conchita Martinez, Rybakina is dealing with more worrying personnel issues as ex-coach Stefano Vukov was recently suspended for breaching the WTA's Code of Conduct.

The Athletic reported Vukov will remain suspended for at least a year, leading Rybakina to incorporate Davide Sanguinetti as her official coach though it is widely understood that Vukov still holds the proverbial reins.

Despite the off-court issues, Rybakina has put together a strong week in Dubai, saving six match points to defeat Paula Badosa. *—PTI*

## Ahlawat shoots 70 to tie at 45th in Kenya

**NAIROBI, 21 FEB**

Indian golfer Veer Ahlawat was cruising along when three late bogeys saw him card a one-under 70, leaving him tied for 45th after the opening round of the Magical Kenya Open on the DP World Tour here.

The Indian, who is a rookie on the Tour, was cruising at four-under through his first nine holes at the Muthaiga Golf Club, but ran into three bogeys in the last four holes.

India's other representative in the field Shubhankar Sharma (71) was Tied 65th.

John Parry and Benjamin Hebert posted rounds of bogey-free eight-under par rounds of 63 to take a share of lead.

Ahlawat had a great first nine, which was the back stretch of the course. He birdied the 10th, 14th and 15th before landing an eagle on the 18th. In between he dropped a shot on the 16th. He was 4-under for the back at 4-under 31. *—PTI*

# Kerala enters historic Ranji Trophy final

**AHMEDABAD, 21 FEB**

A resilient Kerala on Friday sealed their maiden Ranji Trophy final by taking a dramatic two-run first-innings lead over Gujarat, 68 years after making their debut in Indian cricket's premier domestic competition.

Going into the final day at 429/7, the home side, who won the Ranji title in 2016-17, needed just 29 runs to take a first innings lead.

However, left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate delivered under pressure, taking all three wickets to bowl Gujarat out for 455 in 174.4 overs to leave them two runs short of the mark. Making only their second semifinal appearance, the visitors had been left frustrated by a dogged 72-run eighth-wicket stand between Jaymeet Patel (74 overnight) and Siddharth Desai (24 overnight). They started the day needing three wickets with just 28 runs to defend. Kerala, who last made the semifinals in 2018-19 after making their Ranji debut back in 1957, will face Vidarbha in the summit clash after the latter defeated heavyweights Mumbai by 80 runs in the other semifinal.

Kerala 457 and 114 for 4 in 46 overs (Jalaj Saxena 37 not out, Rohan Kunnummal 32; Manan Hingrajia 2/22, Siddharth Desai 2/45) vs Gujarat 455; 174.4 overs (Priyank Panchal 148, Jaymeet Patel 79, Aarya Desai 73; Jalaj Saxena 4/149, Aditya Sarwate 4/111). Kerala won by the first innings lead. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## DC eye top spot as UP chase first win in WPL

**BENGALURU, 21 FEB**

DC vs UPW Match starts at 7.30 pm IST

Delhi Capitals will aim to claim the top spot, while UP Warriorz will be desperate to register their first win of the season when the two sides face off in the Women's Premier League here on Saturday.

Currently sitting second on the points table behind Royal Challengers Bengaluru, DC have won two of their three games. In contrast, UP Warriorz finds itself at the bottom, reeling from back-to-back defeats. The two teams clashed earlier this week in Vadodara, where DC cruised to a dominant seven-wicket victory.

Pre-tournament favorites Delhi will be buoyed by skipper Meg Lanning's return to form, alongside crucial contributions from the middle order, including Marizanne Kapp and Annabel Sutherland. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## India beat Ireland 3-1 in men's FIH Pro League

**BHUBANESWAR, 21 FEB**

The Indian men's hockey team came back from a goal down to beat Ireland 3-1 in the FIH Pro League here on Friday. The Indians were stunned by the Irish in the eighth minute when Jeremy Duncan scored from a field effort. But the Indians bounced back strongly, scoring a field goal through Mandeep Singh in the 22nd minute.

Jarmapnpreet Singh (45th) and Sukhjeet Singh (58th) then scored a goal each from penalty corners to hand India the convincing win.

India will next take on Ireland in the return leg match here on Saturday. *—PTI*

EUROPA LEAGUE

# *Dybala double sends Roma to last 16*

**LONDON, 21 FEB**

Paulo Dybala struck twice in four minutes as Roma beat Porto 3-2 to reach the Europa League round of 16 on Thursday.

Dybala returned from a knee injury sustained in the first-leg 1-1 draw a week ago in Portugal, and Roma advanced on a 4-3 aggregate score.

Porto went ahead thanks to Samu's acrobatic volley over his shoulder to take a 2-1 aggregate lead but Dybala started the comeback with an equalizer in the 35th with a left-footed shot inside the far post. The second clinical finish came from inside the area to the near post.

Porto's hopes were dented when Stephen Eustáquio was sent off after getting a red card only six minutes into the second half.

Substitute Niccolò Pisilli added the third before another substitute Devyne Rensch's own goal in stoppage time.

Roma, the 2022 Conference League champion, will next play either Lazio or Bilbao.

The game between Anderlecht and Fenerbahce was briefly suspended due to crowd trouble in Brussels. The problems took place shortly after Youssef En-Nesyri scored for Fenerbahce in the fourth minute. The Turkish team had won the first leg 3-0. After a 2-2 draw, Fenerbahce advanced 5-2 on aggregate.

The match had been suspended for "security issues," UEFA said. Riot police were deployed in the stands and play resumed after some 15 minutes.

Alkmaar advanced after a 2-2 draw with Galatasaray that saw the Dutch club reach the next round on a 6-3 aggregate score.

Alkmaar got goals from Seiya Maikuma and Denso Kasius before Victor Osimhen struck for the Istanbul club. Roland Sallai's equalizer salvaged at least a draw on the night for the hosts.

Alkmaar is set to face either Manchester United or Tottenham next.

Romanian team FCSB beat PAOK 2-0 to progress on a 4-1 aggregate score. *—PTI*